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THE ABOH KINGDOM OF THE LOWER NIGER c. 1650-1900

A thesis submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Wisconsin in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

by

Kingsley O. Ogedengbe

Degree to be awarded

January 19<u>71</u>

June 19—

August 19—

To Professors: Vansina

Curtin

Young

This thesis having been approved in respect to form and mechanical execution is referred to you for judgment upon its substantial merit.

Dean

Approved as satisfying in substance the doctoral thesis requirement of the University of Wisconsin.

Major Professor

Date of Examination, Jan. 11 19 71

THE ABOH KINGDOM OF THE LOWER NIGER, c.1650-1900

by

KINGSLEY OLADIPO OGEDENGBE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
(History)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

1971

PREFACE

The study of Nigerian history has been largely a study of the Hausa states of the Savanna Belt and the later Fulani Empire of Uthman dan Fodio; the forest empires of Oyo and Benin, and the communities of the Niger Delta. The attention of historians has been mostly focussed on these areas because there exists a large amount of written material for their study. The spread of Islam into the Hausa country in the course of the first millenium A.D. and the culturally significant establishment of the Fulani Empire in the early nineteenth century facilitated the preservation of records in Arabic script. For the Yoruba people, early missionary activities, and the events connected with the spread inland of British power have both combined to provide the historian with a mine of documents. The involvement of the great Empire of Benin and the coastal city states in the overseas trade as early as the fifteenth century has made possible large collections of records in various European archives.

The greater majority of ethnic groups and polities encompassed in the region between the coastal states and the Niger-Benue Rivers, and extending from the boarders of the more widely known Oyo and Benin empires to the Cross River have received little attention. This is due essentially to the paucity of conventional material other

than oral. Very little use seem to have been made of the available oral data. The Igbo-speaking peoples are perhaps the most neglected in this wide region. Igbo history even at the university level, is little more than a discussion of Igbo social structure.

This vast country is usually described solely in economic terms. Thus, one comes across the phrase "coastal hinterland", or "interior areas of production", from whence slaves, ivory and palm-oil reached the coast. An unfortunate concomitant of this narrow perspective is the impression that this region constituted a mere commercial and political appendage of the coast.

This study has been undertaken in the hope that it will provide a modest contribution to knowledge of one of the many Igbo-speaking polities of the hinterland. An exploration in local history, this study examines the oral traditions of the Aboh people, and attempts to answer such questions as 'why' and 'when', inevitably tied to the origins of a people or state. It seeks to enlarge the dimension of the Niger Valley trade system, and in particular, to indicate the role of the kingdom of Aboh in this set up. Finally, it is hoped to show that quite significant socio-political changes (beyond producing trade commodities) occurred in the interior, and that the hinterland was not a

political or commercial dependency of the coast.

The successful completion of this dissertation has depended on the combined efforts of many persons to whom I am greatly indebted.

I will forever remain grateful to the Phelps-Stokes and Edward Hazen Funds whose award of an Aggrey Fellowship made it possible for me to come to the United States. I also wish to acknowledge a generous grant from the Ford Foundation and the University of Wisconsin's African Studies Programme which made it possible for me to undertake field-work in Nigeria during 1969-70.

I owe an especial debt of gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Jan Vansina, for stimulating my interest in historical research of this nature, and for advice, encouragement and criticism. Grateful appreciation is extended to Professors P. D. Curtin and M. Crawford Young who both read and offered valuable suggestions for improving the manuscript. Errors which remain are entirely of my own making.

Those who made this study possible are far too numerous to name individually. I wish however to thank Mr. and Mrs. A. O. Dudu, Mr. and Mrs. S. T. Bajah, Mr. and Mrs. C. Tobi, Mr. and Mrs. G. Okoro, Mr. Mrs. Kayoma and Mr. and Mrs. L. Ijoma, for their kindness and hospitality. I thank the staff of the Public Records Office, London, the C.M.S.

Archives, London and the Nigerian National Archives, Ibadan for their help. My thanks are especially due to Mr. H. Enebeli who accompanied me to Aboh during my field work and to Chief and Mrs. Odiakhosa for their kindness and interest.

Grateful appreciation is extended to all my informants, a list of which is supplied in the appendix. I wish however to give credit to Chief Ijomah Essumei, Chief Opia Ijoma, Chief R. B. Ugbomah, Prince Ogwu Imegwu, Mr. P. V. Oputa, Mr. A. O. Nwachukwu and Mr. S. B. Omoregie for their invaluable assistance.

I thank Mr. G. I. Jones of Cambridge University for opinions on Igbo migrations; Mr. O. Otiede of the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, Benin, for making the records of the Ministry available to me; Mr. Jonathan Ekpenyong for the maps used in this study; Mr. D. Vikre for the plates; and Dr. and Mrs. Uya for their kindness and hospitality on the many occasions I have had to visit Madison.

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THE ABOH KINGDOM OF THE LOWER NIGER, c.1650-1900

Kingsley Oladipo Ogedengbe

Under the supervision of Professor Jan Vansina

Interest in African history has in recent years been focussed on the use of oral traditions in the reconstruction of pre-European contact period. This study of Aboh attempts, through the methodology of oral traditions, to pool the unrecorded past of the Aboh people and what is known from documents. A major focus is the construction, from oral data, of an absolute time scale for events in the history of the kingdom. The study also examines the theme of early African reaction to European economic imperialism and shows that opposition to Europeans (incipient nationalism?) was not unknown in the hinterland.

Aboh is located on the right bank of the River Niger, about 130 miles from the coast. Although Aboh traditions tell of migrations from Benin early in the sixteenth century, they are to be interpreted as essentually those of the intrusive ruling class. The country before this was settled by Igbo-speaking peoples from across the Niger. While traditions of migrations from Benin are generally correct, a long span of history would appear to have been telescoped by the traditions. Thus, while Bini elements may have set out in the early sixteenth century the kingdom of Aboh was not founded until the 1650/1680s. The emergence

of a centralized polity in a region hitherto dominated by loosely organized societies must therefore be sought in the vicinity of Aboh. Migration from the near-by village of Ashaka to Aboh would seem to have been stimulated by trade.

The timing of the migration from Ashaka to Aboh (c.1650/1680) suggests that European trade must have constituted a primary attraction. Aboh's strategic location enabled her to control much of the trade of the Niger Valley and to serve as one of the main centres through which manufactures reached much of the interior.

The necessities of trade on the Niger Valley were however found to exceed the resources of small kin-centred domestic units. The process of ikwa ogbe by which immigrants and slaves were incorporated into growing lineages headed by potential entrepreneurs provided the answer. In time, the main social units of Aboh became the broad-based and non-kin ogbe or ward. Politically, the great wealth which this trade concentrated in the hands of successive kings led to the expansion of the kingdom both along the Niger and further inland.

The European discovery of the mouth of the River Niger in the 1830's and their determination to forge direct commercial links with the communities of the Lower Niger led to the decline of Aboh. Initially the Aboh welcomed the opportunity to lessen their dependence on the coastal states,

and to make larger profits on local produce. The policy turned out to be misguided. Contrary to the hope entertained by the Aboh, European trading concerns established stations at several points along the Niger Valley, thus providing the country upstream with direct outlet for its produce.

The result was a sharp contriction of the scope for trade open to Aboh, and the gradual undermining of one of the bases of Aboh royal authority - wealth and power from the monopoly of trade. The suffocating control which the British National African Company exercised over the trade of the Niger and the internal affairs of Aboh further accelerated the process of decline. When the company's charter was revoked by 1900, Aboh was little more than a shadow of its old self.

.....

Professor Jan Vansina
Supervisor

CHAPTER ONE

PRELUDE: ENVIRONMENT AND ABOH ORAL TRADITIONS

The British anthropologist Godfrey Lienhardt has suggested that any description of a foreign society, no matter how simplified, would be incomplete without a certain degree of involvement in an examination of the interrelations of communities with their environment. This pre-occupation with human ecology is particularly relevant in the study of pre-industrial societies where technological development is still at an early stage and where the people are forced to adapt to the demands of their environment. According to Lienhardt, the most obvious effect of environment on a people is upon their economy. It is through the various means by which people make a livelihood that social relations are influenced.[1] Lord Hailey put this kind of argument more strongly when he asserted that the history of a region could be "written in its geographical features".[2]

The concept of geographical determinism has in recent years been strongly criticized, and justifiably so, because it has left a number of questions unresolved, not least of which is the fact that groups of people inhabiting a common area evidence quite different

languages and cultures. The critics, while not overlooking environment as an important factor in the development of culture, prefer to view it as an element which allows for a range of behavior. C. Daryll Forde put the argument of the critics rather succintly in the following statement:

> Physical conditions enter intimately into every cultural development and pattern, not excluding the most abstract and non-material; they enter not as determinists, but as one category of the raw material of cultural elaboration. The study of the relations between cultural patterns and physical conditions is of the greatest importance for an understanding of human society, but it cannot be undertaken in terms of simple geographical controls alleged to be identifiable on sight.[3]

It remains true, however, that the extent to which environmental necessity influences modes of behavior or culture patterns varies from one society to another. For the Aboh people, it would appear valid to argue that the strategic location of the city of Aboh on the banks of the Niger River has been the most powerful influence in her economic, social and political history.

In the fourth decade of the last century when various European expeditions travelled up the River Niger, the metropolis of Aboh was described as standing one mile up a creek of the same name, on the right bank, some 130 miles from the Atlantic coast. Over the years, the length of the creek has been greatly reduced by the action of erosion on the Niger itself, so that part of the town now stands on the bank of the River. A systematic examination of this

Plate I. Aboh Creek

environment, the relation in which it stands to adjoining territories, and the adaptations the Aboh have had to make in order to exploit its resources more readily, is therefore a useful aid to an appreciation of Aboh history and society.

The Lower Niger Valley begins at the confluence above Lokoja in the north and extends to the Delta on the Atlantic. Historically, the valley constitutes an economic unit despite marked ethnic and topographical dissimilarities. The area between the confluence and the point where the major outlets of the Niger branch out - a short distance below Aboh - may be distinguished as the Niger Valley proper. Below this is the Delta. Of gigantic dimensions, the Niger Delta, which extends over a coastal distance of about 270 miles from the Mahin river in the west to the Cross River in the east, covers an area of some 14,000 square miles. The Delta is about 120 miles deep along its principal outlet ---the Nun---but its coastline on the twin Bights of Benin and Biafra is pierced through by some nineteen rivers. The most important of these are the Benin, Escravos, Forcados, Brass, Calabar, Bonny, Opobo and Cross. From the Atlantic coast, the system just described comprises sandy beach ridges of alluvial deposits averaging from two to five feet above the mean high water level. The width of these ridges average between a hundred feet and ten miles in places. In the past, these ridges constituted one of the greatest difficulties to the navigation of the Niger by steam vessels. It was

often found necessary to solicit the help of African peoples who inhabited adjoining lands to pilot vessels through the "passses".

Next to this region is the salt-water swamp zone, averaging between 20 and 25 miles in width, and exposed to a daily inundation at high tide. At the northern end of the Delta is the fresh-water swamp, which experiences only seasonal flooding.

The characteristic vegetation of the Niger Delta is the weird mangrove tree, rhizophora racemosa, whose roots hang high above water level as branches hang above the stems of trees. Under ideal conditions, the mangrove grows as high as 150 feet, but generally speaking, the mangrove forest is low and continuous. Cutting through this thick vegetation and interlinking the main distributaries of the Niger is an incredible pattern of meandering creeks and channels. According to Morel these twist and turn "in such fantastic contours [that] the whole country is honeycombed to such an extent as to become converted into an interminable series of islands."[4]

The Delta conjured up much gloom in the eyes of early European visitors to this part of the Guinea coast. Most visitors had adverse comments to make on the region's economic and health potentials. The malaria-infested, mangrove proved to be a death snare to Europeans, as yet vulnerable to the bite of the mosquito.

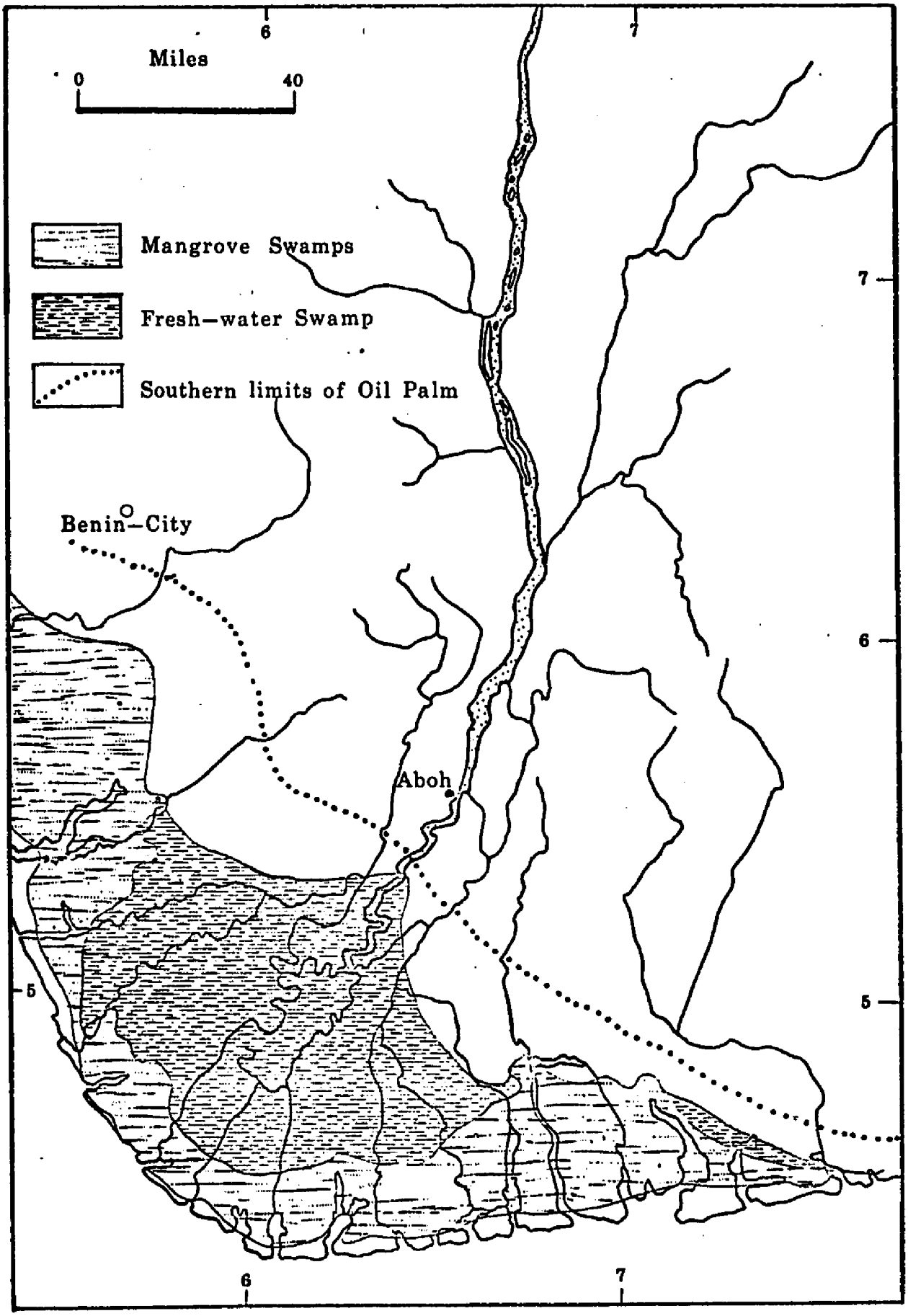


Fig. 1. The Delta and the Niger Valley

> "It is not possible", wrote a typical European visitor, "for any picture whether drawn by the hand or conjured by the mind, to portray the painful monotony of the mangrove which Nature has smirched in her dullest green, the muddy dinginess of the grey-brown turgid waters, the foetid evil-smelling swamps of slime and ooze, reeking with malaria, and with a life that is repulsive ...."[5]

Despite its seeming "worthlessness", enterprising Ijo-speaking groups migrated from the interior into the Delta to build fishing, trading and salt-panning communities. The Delta is not devoid of land, and not nearly as unhealthy as it was represented by early Europeans. As Dr. R. K. Udo noted, these visitors had made their acquaintance with the Niger in the region of Port-Harcourt and similar places where the land is particularly low. Even the humid swamp of the salt-water zone, though cut into giant jig-saw pieces, is interspersed with immense tracts of dry land. With the inception of trade with Europe in the fifteenth century and after, these Ijo communities became the most important cities of foreign trade on the Atlantic coast. The Delta had thus gone from early obscurity, in terms of the scale and space of interraction, to become, by the nineteenth century, the frontier of opportunity on the Guinea coast. These Ijo states were strategically sited along vital nerve lines of communication with the interior. Thus, their citizens were able to play the highly lucrative role of middlemen in the trade between Europeans and Africans in this part of the continent.[6]

North of the freshwater swamp begins an almost imperceptible transition into the zone of tropical high forest and

heavy rainfall. From this point northward, the submerged swamps begin to give way to distinct, low but regular banks of solid earth. The branches of the Niger merge a short distance below Aboh, and the banks of the noticeably wide trough are now graced by luxuriant evergreen trees, and a thick almost impenetrable undergrowth. The vegetation of the tropical rain forest is a mixed compound of timber, notably the valuable mahogany and plantain, but the most economically significant is the palm tree, elaeis guineensis. The palm tree from which palm-oil is derived grows wild throughout the tropical rain forest zone of Southern Nigeria, and is encountered as far north as Idah, where the Igala people engage in the manufacture of palm-oil. The palm tree is more densely distributed in the moister soils of the belt between Onitsha and the apex of the Delta, wherever the forest is relatively light.

The city of Aboh is located inside this zone. Consequently its inhabitants were to play a major role in the network of trade which developed between the interior and the coastal Ijo communities mentioned earlier.

It is necessary to stress that the Niger River was the principal channel of internal and external communication in what became the Republic of Nigeria. Commercial, social and political relations between the various communities lining its course from the Delta to the Benue confluence, and even beyond, were of basic importance. The Portuguese

voyages of exploration in the Guinea area in and after the late fifteenth century, coupled with the Atlantic trade in slaves and palm-oil, greatly increased the value of the Niger as the highway into the heart of the continent. Those who were already settled along its course became the first to be exposed to the great social and economic changes inherent in trade and culture contact with aliens. Others, who may have been indirectly influenced by these new events, saw the opportunities offered by this natural highway system and sought settlements at vantage points along its course. In this manner, a web of trading communities stretched from the confluence to the Atlantic sea-board, cutting through geographical and ethnic differences. Although the various communities were located in two different broad environmental regions, and each group of settlements was strictly limited to that range of commodities it could produce, all were nevertheless firmly united in seeking profitable exchange.

Opinions as to why and when the Aboh people settled the bank of the Niger vary. There is, however, little doubt that much of the prominence which the city enjoyed during the centuries of trade with Europe is due to her citizens having utilized the unique opportunities offered by Aboh's strategic location. This very location permitted settlers to channel trade from the northern sections of the River Niger to the coastal regions thereby acting as middlemen in the trading network. For the people of Aboh, the physical conditions and the economic system outlined above became raw materials

for the elaboration of new cultural forms aimed at a better and more efficient prosecution of the trade. Clearly, it should be expected that both the social and political structures of the emergent kingdom would be most profoundly effected by all the factors resulting from a combination of trade and environment.

II

The origins of the kingdom of Aboh survive only in a tradition of migration from Benin. Thus, any attempt at reconstructing the development of the kingdom must necessarily depend on oral tradition. Aboh society is one in which kinship dominates social interraction. Thus, socio-political stability has continued to rest on the traditional power structure, and not on a modern bureaucratic system as is the case in the urbanized centers. The economic system is still largely dependent on the age-old combination of agriculture, fishing and trade. The agents of modernization are noticably absent. Beside two poorly attended elementary schools, a small maternity centre, a dispensary, and a postal agency, the people rely largely on traditional expertise for their daily services and needs.

Keeping in mind the history of Aboh, one can readily agree with Dr. S. O. Biobaku that "all people live their history, but those who do not write it down, live it more consciously than those who do".[7] For in Aboh, we find the force of custom or tradition performing a crucial function, which

according to Professor Jan Vansina is to "give direction, motivation and justification for action". Custom and traditions serve as models of behavior, all of which are justified by reference to the past.[8] In summary, then, the preservation of cultural values, and the continuity of techniques of farming, fishing and manufactures are all dependent upon oral traditions.

In the late 1920's a British administrative officer spent a total of 84 days in the neighbourhood of Aboh. During that time he travelled through 48 villages collecting traditions. Several other officers followed in his footsteps. Their reports taken together form the most valuable mine of information for any study of Aboh and neighbouring peoples. Despite the great contribution which Mr. Williams has made to the historiography of the Aboh people, he felt sufficiently frustrated to record that:

> legend and tradition does not amount to very much among these clans, many of whom obstinately maintain that their ancestors fell from heaven or alternately sprung from the ground.

Despite his assertion, only two of about 50 clans which Mr. Williams studied put forward any such extraordinary claims. For most groups, Mr. Williams presented elaborate traditions, many of which indicate mixed migration from distant areas.[9]

Mr. Williams was no anthropologist. Neither was he trained in the use of oral data. It is to his credit that, lacking the tools of these disciplines, he was able to produce a detailed and most valuable study. Nonetheless, it

is easy to see in Mr. Williams' frustrated claim the outdated notion that the "historical frame of mind", existed only in complex and literate societies. Associated with this idea is an equally pernicious and similarly outdated one; that non-literate and technologically simple societies are primitive, myth-oriented, and totally devoid of any sense of history.

Not only industrial and socio-political revolutions, ordered and documented parliamentary debates and global wars, in which sophisticated weaponry are used, make history. Azevedo quite rightly pointed out that history

> is a functional requirement of social existence that will be manifested in some form in any human society, though the outsider may have difficulty in identifying it in terms familiar to him.[10]

We have come a long way from a recent past during which the wildest assertions were made in denigration of oral history, and during which written documents were deemed the only respectable source materials for historians.[11] The problem now, as Professor Philip Curtin points out, is not whether oral tradition should be used. All source material, he points out, ought to be consulted by the student of history. The concern now is with the development and perfection of techniques for evaluating oral data and their application to traditions within particular social contexts. Oral traditions, according to Professor Curtin, are as amenable to the ordinary standards and methods of historical investigation as more orthodox source materials.[12]

Research students have described the difficulties they experienced trying to find the equivalent of the word "history" in the local language. The main problem is distinguishing between history based on facts and ordinary fables. The Aboh people understand "true" history as distinct from fire-side stories and fables. The former is referred to by the rather formal term aka, a word which is synonymous with "antiquity". Fables and bed-time stories are called inu. The highly respectable and artistic narration of history is known by the phrase ita aka i.e. "to recall past events." When one finds such a clear-cut distinction between fables and events categorized as actuality, he is led to raise two pertinent questions: What characterises aka or actual history? How are they preserved and transmitted?

The Aboh do not have narrators whose social roles are equivalent to the Ruandese abiiru or the Yoruba arokin and onirara.[13] These are the professional and often hereditary classes of praise singers, historians and reciters of dynastic lists and genealogies. Aboh traditions fall within the category of folk traditions and are avidly diffused in the society. Anyone may recite these traditions. However, it does not follow that every member of the community knows the traditions and customs to the same degree. Although there are no institutionalized traditions with a class of professional historians, certain individuals approach the status of "specialists" by virtue of their vocation

There exists, for example, numerous praise-poems. Most of these serve as decorations for a typical recitation, but they often mask actual historical events. Usually the occasion of a community dance is grasped by seasoned lead singers --okwa abu--to introduce this category of poem. Such poems form the main elements of Aboh solos. The lead singers at community dances constitute a highly respected group in the society. Most of them attain their status by patient practice and a lengthy period of apprenticeship. The emphasis in their studies is as much on voice training as it is in the intricate art of weaving history, parables, praises etc. into songs. Lead singers were indispensable at major rituals and festivals. It was not unusual for organizers of dances to send for renowned lead-singers from far-off communities on important ceremonial occasions.

It should be noted that although lead-singing provides an open field for individual creativity, most of the deeds and events commemorated in the songs are common knowledge, drawn from the general body of Aboh traditions.

The Ashimadei or royal drummer, who ranks among the Olinzele or traditional chiefs in the kingdom,acquires the art of communicating certain fixed poems through the medium of the ufie.[14] Most of the poems contain historical events which are attributed to the reigns of previous Obi, or kings of Aboh. Thus, to remind an Obi constantly that the Aboh

people do not tolerate tyrants and power drunken absolutists, the Ashimadei beats the following poem whenever the Obi emerges from his chamber to attend on the chiefs:

Obonwe! Obonwe! Obonwe!
Kwulu wuzo, kwulu wuzo
Aboh meni eze we mbu
Adangbugbu meni ife n'aka
Obonwe! Obonwe! kwulu wuzo

Your Excellency (Obonwe),
pause and watch your step
advance with caution.
The Aboh once disgraced their king
A deep pit (adangbugbu) did something
in the past that few will ever forget.
Your Excellency, be careful, watch your steps.[15]

The Ashimedei is here recounting one of the most important events in Aboh history. According to Aboh traditions, an early Obi, whose name is Ozegbe, was extremely cruel and heartless. He promulgated harsh laws, and punished all those guilty of breaking the rules with prompt severity and brutal savagery. Unable to continue under Ozegbe's tyranny, the chiefs took counsel to eliminate him. For some unexplained reasons, they avoided any direct confrontation with the king. Instead they got the palace aids to dig a pit underneath the throne. It's surface was afterwards concealed with matting. Unaware of the trap, Ozegbe fell into the pit in the presence of the assembled chiefs and was killed. Since then, the poem above has always been used to caution Aboh kings. Accordingly, they emerge from their chambers with the greatest caution; they gently pick their steps, hold their official staff with

outstretched arms, and pound the earth before them to ensure that there is no hole.

Some of the words in this kind of poem are no longer understood by the common people. For example, the word aka is an archaic form of "the past" and no longer in use. In most cases, commentaries accompany these poems. All of these narratives are handed down to those who are training to fill the office of Ashimadei.

Every Obi is, by the nature of his ritualistic office, a specialist in the history of the community, especially in the ceremonies and rituals of kingship. As the only person entitled to offer sacrifice to the ofo nze (ancestral ofo of the entire Aboh community) the Obi is the highest priest in the land. The ofo cult, is the pivot of Aboh religion. It represents an outward expression of the belief in the intervention of the ancestors in the affairs of the community.

The ofo itself is a branchlet of the detarium senegalense, and is believed to symbolize the ancestors. To the Aboh and all Igbo-speaking peoples, it is conceived of as a guarantor of truth and the symbol of political and moral leadership. Every lineage treasures the ofo of its founder. This is passed on from one generation to another, ordinarily, under the custody of the lineage headman. As a rule, the higher an ofo is in the genealogical table, the more potent the Aboh believe it to be, and the greater therefore is its ritual significance. It is the most powerful sanction in the community and the guarantor of good behavior, and the Aboh people swear by the ofo whenever there are disputes.[16] In this respect the ofo is analagous

to the Bible in modern judicial systems. Dr. William Balfour Baikie, who led an expedition to Aboh in the middle of the nineteenth century, noted that

> when a man is suspected of falsehood, one of these [ofo] is placed in his right hand, and he is made to swear by it, and if he does so falsely, it is believed that some ill will speedily befall him.[17]

The ofo nze, which is in practice, a collection of the ofo of previous holders of the office of Obi, is the most important shrine the Aboh possess. Once a year at the uje ritual festival, the Obi and the principal chiefs offer sacrifice to these ofo. The occasion is itself significant, for the uje is a fertility and harvest ceremony which the Aboh use to mark the yearly yam harvest and the highly symbolic tasting of new yam by the Obi. The principal event in the week-long ceremony is the slaughter of cattle and goats to the ofo nze. On this occasion, the ofo are lined up in what is known to be the exact order of the reign of the kings they represent. The officiating Obi identifies each ofo by name as he calls on them to accept the sacrifice of their children and ensure another bountious harvest. Thus, an Obi acquires a fairly sound knowledge of the number of kings who have reigned before him and the principal events connected with each reign.

The ofo nze are not, like the ordinary wooden ofo, subject to decay. Every Obi is represented by an ornamented ofo cast in bronze, and these are in the custody of the reigning monarch. Unlike other ofo, the ofo nze may not be seen by anyone except the most important titled chiefs.

At the death of the Obi, they pass into the custody of a special official, the ojingwu, who stores them during the interregnum. Before the death of Obi Oputa in 1964, there were sixteen such bronze ofo nze, which my informants say are much larger than the average size ofo. The office of Obi, at the time of writing this has not been filled. It was however confirmed that the ofo of the late Obi Oputa would be added as soon as a new king was installed.[18] It might also be said that the duties of some of the olinzele place them in a similarly strong position as specialists.

One valuable source of historical knowledge is the Aboh praise names or afa ekene. Praise names take precedence over all other appropriate kinship terminologies. They are of great importance because they are considered a more appropriate term of address than given names. Some of the praise names originated from real life events, such as wars, success in business, agriculture, or other conducts to which society attach value.

Some of these names are retained in a particular lineage through the ritual of ima agwu. This ceremony is closely linked with the concept of the ofo and the ancestors. The ceremony is evidence of the Aboh belief in the spirit world. The term agwu may be loosely translated as 'ancestor' or 'spirit'. The spirit world is inhabited by the ancestors and other deceased members of the lineage, who continue their interest in the welfare of the family.

They manifest this interest by re-incarnating themselves in later generations. Either before or shortly after a baby is born a dibia or 'doctor' is summoned to say which ancestor is being re-born. At the ima agwu i.e. identifying the spirit, the baby assumes the name of the ancestor believed to have reincarnated it. The Aboh believe that the baby will grow in the image and resourcefulness of the ancestor he or she personifies. In a few cases, the older people around are able to identify certain physical characteristics of the ancestor. It is also believed that the child would become ill, and could die if this ceremony was not performed. This is also an occasion for remembering the deeds of the ancestor who has been kind enough to return to the family. There are understandably some embelishments in the praise heaped upon the reborn ancestor. But these occasions serve to keep the names of the ancestors and events connected with their lives fresh in the mind of the people. A few examples are offered to illustrate this point.

In Aboh, the praise name Ogbulie suggests a warrior, a particularly powerful man. In the event that this name has continued in a lineage, it is sometimes possible to learn something about the man who originated it, the circumstances under which he adopted it, and his position in the genealogy. If a young man who has inherited the

name Ogbulie acquits himself honourably in a wrestling contest, the elders might be heard to say: "He has taken after his great grand-father", or such other appropriately named ancestor. If a man's harvest is particularly good, and he is proven a resourceful farmer, the same comment might be heard. It is often possible to extract some precise information of historical value from the elders of the lineage. As for the most important personalities, information so obtained can be checked with what other people, not connected with the family, know.

Some praise names re-state Aboh cultural values and they are excellent sources of these values. For example, the praise name ndiom ebichi ngulu is an expression of one of the cardinal principles of Aboh society: women cannot be heirs. Others merely stress strongly held religious beliefs. Thus, Chukwu keni: God is the creator of all things; Chukwu jindu: God is the custodian of life; ife aka Chukwu: nothing surpasses God. These names are reflections of Aboh belief in a Supreme Being, and mover of the universe. The Aboh belief in predestination is expressed by the praise name ife oma dinukwa meaning "fortune comes only from destiny." The importance of the kin group is emphasized by the name nwa dini ugwu which means "a person is nothing outside his kin group." The traditional chieftaincy office of Akpanuka has the praise name akpanu nwala no ji obu. This archaic expression means "Akpanuka, the

host of war medicine men." Although the office has undergone considerable changes, the praise name serves as reminder of the historic role of previous holders of the office of Akpanuka. It is also possible to infer that warfare with neighbouring peoples was considered a sufficiently serious threat to invite seasoned medicine or juju men from outside.

The process of preserving and transmitting oral traditions in Aboh thus depends very largely on self-initiative, and also in some few opportunities open to individuals to learn traditions. The families in which certain major chieftaincies have been de facto hereditary are more favorably placed than others for learning traditions. One finds that sons of chiefs, who in the past were renowned as 'experts', are themselves well versed in local history.

There are many reasons why the Aboh people study oral traditions. One of the more obvious is the great value and high regard which the society attaches to knowledge of the past. In principle, the older men and women (who, by virtue of their age are considered closest to the ancestors) are the repository of traditions. Knowledge, in Aboh is valid and deemed useful only when it can be shown to have been the experience of nde gbo, or the ancestors. As a corollary to this, those best qualified to pass judgment on what constitutes knowledge are the elderly people. So strongly

do the Aboh believe in the interdependence of historicity and old-age that some people preface traditions with the adage onye kudo ni nada kudoni nde gbo, "whosoever grew sufficiently old to know his father has been enabled to know his ancestors." The moral here is that every generation serves as a crucial link in the long chain of ancestors, thereby ensuring generational continuity.

Most Aboh people acquiant themselves with the barest outline of Aboh traditions without undergoing a formal learning process. Almost every one knows and strongly believes that the Aboh migrated from Benin; that, although the kingdom was founded by Essumei Ukwu, Ogwezi his son, is the 'father' of Aboh; and that the aborigines of the site on which the town stands were the Igbo-speaking Akarai clan. It has been asserted that historical veracity cannot be ascertained by the popularity of myths. While generalization cannot be made for all myths, popularly held versions, and the discernible outline they bear out, do not always emanate from a peoples' imagination.

Lately however, such popularly held myths have come in for serious analysis and questioning, and the lead in this exercise was given by Professor Malinowski. According to him, myths should be perceived as charters for tribal life; as "statements of reality which live in the institutions and pursuits of the people."[19] Professor Fortes, expanding this theme with particular reference to the Tallensi of Northern Ghana, asserts that

> myths of origin become intelligible when it is realized that they are nothing more than formulations of the contemporary scheme of political and ceremonial relationship.[20]

Put another way, the popular version had been moulded to serve a given purpose, but having been established, it conditions the thought process of the people on a particular aspect of their culture. Valid as this thesis is, it would appear to be an over-simplification and an over-generalization of a more complex subject. It also implies that historical source material could have a universally objective validity outside of their social contexts. Others have been less pessimistic, and P. C. Lloyd for one, emphasizes the value of interdisciplinary co-operation in the sphere of oral traditions.

> "If the sociologist outlines the functions of these myths," wrote Lloyd, "... the historian may be able to see in what directions distortion is most likely to have taken place and to assess better their value as historical evidence."[21]

Off hand, the Malinowski school will most likely categorize Aboh traditions as functional, since they may be interpreted as validating the two tier class system of Umudei (princes) and ndichie (aliens and people of slave descent). The origins and development of these two classes are reserved for a later chapter.[22] Suffice it to say that wherever oral traditions serve such an important cause, an attitude other than the casualness the Aboh display in the preservation and transmission of their traditions is indispensable

Thus, traditions which serve as charters must in the first place be deliberately and carefully formulated, and formal institutions and techniques developed by the 'class' or 'group' with a positive vested interest, to ensure both consistency and continuity. Such is the purpose of the abiiru and abacurabwenge of Ruanda and the muslim griots of West Africa. This is not to argue that traditions are falsified in every case where there are specialists. The pertinent question is not whether this or that tradition has been consciously distorted, although this is not unimportant, but what the motivation for creating a specialist and often hereditary class of historians is. In some extreme cases, this class of specialists suffer dire penalties for mistakes in transmission. Paradoxically, the decision as to whether or not mistake has occurred in transmission is not theirs to make. While maintaining a studied skepticism for oral traditions, E. S. Hartland has aptly warned that

> the existence of a body of traditional narrative locked up in the bossom of a close corporation, who alone have a right to know them, or to divulge them on stated or special occasions, affords no guarantee for their accuracy, or even for their substantial truth. Rather such narratives are exposed to special dangers, from which narratives openly known and canvassed in familiar daily converse are comparatively free.[23]

Professor Vansina reaches practically the same conclusion in his discussion of the limitations of oral traditions,

adding that folk traditions of the Aboh type are not subject to the bias imposed by the socio-political functions of institutionalized and controlled traditions.[24]

It might therefore be argued that the absence of a class of specialists in Aboh, and the folk nature of the traditions mean two things. Firstly, the traditions were never the result of a formal enactment by any 'class'. Secondly, those who have continued to transmit them truly believe that they respresent the thoughts and experiences of their ancestors. Whatever support one finds for contemporary socio-political institutions are therefore incidental, and historical. If one might be permitted to borrow Dr. Biobaku's expression, the Aboh 'live' their history more than they seek to re-interpret it.

As will be evident in a later discussion, an individual's social status in Aboh is ascribed.[25] This means that whatever is known of the past is inevitably linked with genealogies. In some ways, Aboh genealogies may be viewed from the perspective of the functionalists, since they regulate present and hopefully, future social relations. Thus, which one of the many categories of chiefly titles a citizen aspires depends exclusively on his pedigree, i.e. whether one is nwadei or ndichie. The important role of genealogies in maintaining social and political balance, and in preserving the cultural values of the Aboh community, posits that great care be exercised in preserving and transmitting them. It also means that no one may arbitrarily decide who his or her ancestors are in order to score

a political or social point. In Aboh, the knowledge of the genealogies of the various lineages is public, and claims to offices are staked in the open and cross-checked by all. Thus, the chances of a falsified genealogy would be uncommon.

Again, genealogies are of vital economic interests. The Aboh recognize four levels of property ownership viz: communal or town, quarter, ward and lineage, and disputes as to what level or who in any one level owns a given piece of farmland or fishing lake is perennial. In staking claims to a piece of property, it was not only sufficient for claimants to recite their genealogies. It was far more important to identify which of the ancestors originally acquired the property and under what circumstances. Of course there have been unresolved disputes, but it was not always because the genealogies were fabricated. As in public offices, the fact that people know the genealogies of their neighbours ensures that there are witnesses to confirm or repute certain claims.

The elective monarchy, which like chieftancy and property rights, is inextricably linked with genealogy facilitates historical reconstruction in Aboh. There are four ruling houses which concide with the four quarters or maximal lineages into which the city is divided. In the event of a vacancy, interested houses put forward candidates. Succession disputes were not uncommon, but much

of this time is utilized by local 'experts' in matching historical knowledge, and verifying the claims of their opponents. It could be argued that such a situation presents an opportunity for unscrupulous reinterpretation of history and alteration of the genealogies to fit the power structure. It does seem however that the issue of whether or not a conscious attempt has been made to distort tradition, is linked, if subconsciously, with the issue of morality. An unfair or unjust structure is foisted on a people by a 'group' or 'class' who then seek validity for it by distorting history.

In pursuing this line of thought it is often forgotten that historical study is not concerned so much with value judgments as with an objective interpretation of the evidence as it is. The existing power structure whether or not traditions have been rigged in its favor, is a process of history, and therefore a legitimate field for the exercise of historical judgment. In the final analysis, Aboh traditions in this regard, have to be interpreted against the totality of the culture.

That there are no 'specialists' means that no one ruling house can lay claim to anything in the nature of total knowledge. Thus a house which earnestly seeks the throne, and believes that its own candidate is best qualified, has to produce evidence of a historical nature with which the other three houses are in agreement. The evidence must bear

the scrutiny of three other interest groups. An elective monarchy has its shortcomings, but, these notwithstanding, it has helped Aboh historiography, notably in the preservation, to a large extent, of the order of succession, and the genealogical relationship between the king and the entire populace. We might thus liken Aboh history to a four-piece jig-saw puzzle, each piece of which is kept by a different ruling house, and all of which must be produced and fitted before a new king is elected. Of course the use of genealogies for the reconstruction of the history of non-literate societies has not escaped the search light of critics. In a later chapter, it is hoped to be demonstrated that Aboh genealogies are relatively free from the two dangers of foreshortening and overstretching.[25] It is however necessary to stress the point that no one lineage controls knowledge of its genealogy, and under such circumstances, forgeries should be rare or, if practised, easily detected.

Political, social and religious enactment ceremonies provide the student of oral traditions with a valuable tool for evaluating his materials, for it is in these re-enactments that a people relive their history. As Dr. Akinjogbin puts it,

> an enactment ceremony has an actual historical beginning in the real occurrence of an important event within the period of the history of the particular people enacting it ... only important events which bear directly on the foundation and growth of a particular kingdom are re-enacted.[26]

There are several re-enactment ceremonies in Aboh, but one major example will suffice to identify the value of this technique for Aboh history. The Aboh people claim that their founding ancestors initially settled at ishi ukpo, also known as ugboko ukwu (lit. great forest), some three miles northwest of the town. At the time, Aboh was inhabited by the Akarai. Although the people later left ishi ukpo to settle in Aboh,after driving the Akarai off the land, the major deities are still housed in the former place. Once every year, a great religious ceremony, in which the founders are commemorated, and all the spirits implored to guard the town, is held at ishi ukpo. In between,numerous sacrifices are taken to ugboko ukwu by various groups, usually the elderly women, both to thank the gods for favors granted and to ask new ones. A strong support for this tradition is to be found in the discernible evidence of scattered homesteads now reduced to ground level by erosion in the vicinity of the shrines.

Before turning to some of the major drawbacks in Aboh traditions it is necessary to examine to what extent traditions already recorded or published serve as feedback. Evidence for this is almost none existent. The earliest accounts by some of the nineteenth century expeditions, Baikie's Narrative of an Exploring Voyage published in 1856, and Mockler-Ferryman's, Up the Niger of 1892 are rare

publications and not easily accessible. The accounts of Mr. G. B. Williams and other administrative officers of the 1920s are lodged in the National Archives Ibadan, and well beyond the reach of the average person. In any event, most people who know the traditions well enough are illiterates or semi-illiterates who have lived in Aboh or the neighbourhood all their lives. Asked how they came about the traditions they now tell, the ready answer was: "My father or grandfather told me". Many counted it an honor to have been in the company of particular old man whose knowledge of Aboh history was widely respected.

But distortion was not uncommon, and a few obvious cases were noted in the course of this research. It was often easy to detect these by comparing versions, and examining in closer detail the relationship of one's informants to the events they emphasize most. For example, one of my informants told a version of the tradition relating to the founding of Aboh. First, it was noticed that names like 'James' and 'Lucy' featured in his version to the total exclusion of the names appearing in the other versions. Of more interest was the fact that the entire thrust of his tradition was less on the migration from Benin than on the settlement of a particular piece of property by someone later discovered to be the person from whom his lineage traces descent. Upon further inquiry it was also discovered that there had been some dispute over the ownership of the

area in question. Some distortions are however unintentional, and it is decidedly difficult to deal with these.

Again, many young people evidence little interest in learning traditions over and beyond the bare outline which they pick up with little effort. The reasons are not far to seek. The present generation of Aboh is in a hurry to be educated and Western values are slowly but steadily replacing traditional ones for such people. Their conception of what is valuable and proper to study is western oriented. Thus most youths spend their time at school instead of accompanying the knowledgeable elders or listening in when they assemble to converse. The Aboh people are versed in the use of parables, and the writer was particularly struck by the profuse use of this category of speech at a chiefs' meeting he was privileged to attend. But few of the younger men are able to use parables with such perfection, precisely because the habit of watching the older people converse has fallen into disuse. Some children are even sent by their parents to live with relatives in the larger towns so that they could have access to 'better' schools. After school years, most young people migrate to the urban centers in search of jobs or a more profitable trade. A few return to Aboh during the annual festivals which provide occasions for family reunions, but the majority pay visits only infrequently. For such people,

alienation from the traditional milieu is almost complete. Professor Curtin's warning that we are perhaps witnessing the last generation of non-literates who know the traditions well might well prove true for Aboh. In the 1940s Aboh history was taught in grade schools, but it passed out of the syllabus some ten years after, and is only just getting back. The problem, which the teachers stressed in unison, was that material beyond the bare outline was non-existent, and few of them possess the time or expertise to carry out investigations on their own.

Lastly, the unprecedented long reign of Obi Oputa (1916-1964) quite paradoxically resulted in a mild unconcern for certain traditions. The general consensus was that before 1916 when the late Obi Oputa was crowned, the Obi of Aboh were famous for very brief reigns. Most people gave a range of between three and five years, as the longest their kings lasted. Early death was attributed to the fact that many of the kings were middle to old age when they assumed the office, and were easily worn out by the exacting demands of government. But the most cited factor was the failure of the Obi to observe the many nso or taboos connected with the traditional uge or palace. The latter fear supposedly weighed heavily in Oputa's request that certain customs, including living in the official palace, be waived for him. Popularly known as eze enu oyibo--"king in the

era of European (oyibo) civilization", Oputa lasted 48 years on the throne, spent between his own palace at Umuojugbali and the more healthy town of Ashaka. There can be little doubt that as a result of the disuse into which the traditional palace had been allowed to fall, some key historical places in this ancient compound are now completely lost to memory. His longevity, fortunate in itself, obviated the almost quinquennial need to bury and elect a king, and with this went all the opportunities for learning some of the traditions involved. Indeed, such was the case, for when Oputa died it was discovered that a good proportion of the lore and rituals associated with the burial of royalty had been lost, and so much effort went into amassing fresh data for this purpose. It would be uncommonly fortunate if everything was recovered.

NOTES

[1]G. Lienhardt, Social Anthropology (Oxford, 1967), pp. 33-41. Chapter 2 entitled "People and Environment" is particularly important for Lienhardt's hypothesis.

[2]Lord Hailey, African Survey (Oxford, 1938), p. 1.

[3]C. Daryll Forde, Habitat, Economy and Society (New York, 1949), p. 464. See also E. L. Schusky and T. Culbert, Introducing Culture (New Jersey, 1967), pp. 91-108.

[4]E. D. Morel, Nigeria, Its Peoples and Problems (London, 1911), p. 49. Among the best topographical discussions of the Niger Delta are J. E. Alagoa, "The Settlement of the Niger Delta", (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1966), pp. 32-53; R. K. Udo, Geographical Regions of Nigeria (London, 1970), pp. 54-9; and K. M. Buchanan and Pugh, Land and People in Nigeria: The Human Geography of Nigeria and its Environmental Background (London, 1955), pp. 33-35.

[5]A. G. Leonard, The Lower Niger and Its Tribes (London, 1906), p. 14.

[6]The settlement of the Niger Delta and the development of the trading cities constitutes one of the best studied themes in the history of modern Nigeria. Among the best works are K. O. Dike, Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885 (Oxford, 1956), G. I. Jones, The Trading States of the Oil Rivers (Oxford, 1963), Alagoa, The Small Brave City-State (Ibadan and Wisconsin, 1964), and Alagoa, "The Settlement of the Niger Delta."

[7]S. O. Biobaku, "The Problem of Traditional History with special reference to Yoruba traditions", Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, 1 (1956), 43.

[8]Jan Vansina, "The functions of Oral Traditions and their influence on the Historical Content of their Source", Proceedings of the Leverhulme Inter-Collegiate History Conference (University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Salisbury, 1962), pp. 119-126.

[9]C.S.O.26/3, File No. 26769, G. B. Williams, "A Report on the Ibo Speaking Clans of the Kivale Division of the Warri

Province", 1930. The other reports on the Aboh and Ukwuani peoples are classified under C.S.O.26/3, and are to be located in the National Archives, Ibadan, Nigeria.

[10] W. L. de Azevedo, "Uses of the Past in Gola Discourse", Journal of African History, 111, 1(1962), 12.

[11] See for example, G. P. Murdock, Africa, Its Peoples and their Culture History (New York, 1957), p. 43 where he asserts that "indegeneous oral traditions are completely undependable much beyond the personal recollections of the living informants". For a summary of the major arguments of the critics of oral traditions see Vansina, Oral Traditions, A Study in Historical Methodology (Chicago, 1965), pp. 1-18.

[12] P. D. Curtin, "Field Techniques for Collecting and Processing Oral Data", Journal of African History, IX, 3(1968), p. 368.

[13] Biobaku, "The Problems of Traditional History with Particular Reference to Yoruba Traditions", p. 43; "Myths and Oral History", Odu, 1, (1955), 13. According to Dr. Biobaku, the official oral historian at Ketu is the Baba Elegun, who had to learn by heart his list of Alaketus (kings of Ketu) their parents, and the order of succession. Any mistake may lead to his execution as it is regarded as an ill-omen to the entire people. "No Baba Elegun has yet faltered, and in this way the authenticity of a list involving more than 48 reigns and generations has been ensured".

[14] The ufie is a hollowed piece of timber sealed off at both ends, with a narrow slit at the top. To produce the different sounds or pitches required for poems or other information, the okwa ufie (one who beats the ufie) strikes either side of the slit alternately. The ufie is also used in the royal court at Benin.

[15] The poem was translated for me by Chief Chukwumah Olise, the Akpanuka of Aboh in an interview at the chief's residence.

[16] The Aboh settle disputes in several ways. One of the most lasting methods was to wash the ancestral ofo (both parties have to be members of the same lineage) into containers from which both parties drink. Any one who went back on his undertaking to keep peace was believed to be courting severe punishment.

Oaths--igide aka--to prevent the making of bad medicine by one person against the other was administered in the same manner.

[17]W. B. Baikie, Narrative of an Exploring Voyage (London, 1856), p. 313.

[18]Interview with No. 7, Appendix A, Lagos, Dec. 1969.

[19]B. Malinowski, Article on Culture in Ecyclopaedia of Social Sciences, quoted in M. Read, "Tradition and Prestige Among the Nguni", Africa, IX (1936), p. 467.

[20]M. Fortes, The Dynamics of Clanship Among the Tallensi (London, 1945), p. 23.

[21]P. C. Lloyd, "Yomba Myths--A Sociologist's Interpretation", Odu, II (1955), 21.

[22]See Chapter three.

[23]E. S. Hartland, "On the Evidential Value of the Historical Traditions of the Buganda and Bushongo", Folklore, XXV (1914), p. 431.

[24]Vansina, Oral Traditions, passim and p. 170. But Vansina appears to associate official traditions with centralized polities. However, non-controlled transmission, or folk-traditions could exist in centralized political structures like Aboh.

[25]See Chapter Four.

[26]I. A. Akinjogbin, "Enactment Ceremony as a Source of Unwritten History", Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research, Conference Proceedings, December, 1958, p. 172. See also Biobaku, "Problems of Traditional History with Reference to Yoruba Traditions", p. 44.

CHAPTER TWO

IGBO ANTECEDENTS

The previous chapter, was primarily concerned with the human ecology of Aboh as well as the characteristics of Aboh oral traditions, and what special values they possess for the reconstruction of Aboh history. In this chapter, it is hoped to demonstrate the Igbo base of Aboh culture.[1] The people of Aboh who also refer to their language as 'Aboh' constitute a section of the greater Igbo ethnic group of Southern Nigeria.[2] According to the census figures of 1953, Igbo-speaking peoples numbered about 5.5 million and are unevenly distributed over an area of some 15,800 square miles. Igbo country which lies athwart the Lower Niger extends to within fifty miles of the Bight of Biafra where it skirts the coastal communities of the Efiks, Bonny and Kalabari. Northwards, along its eastern boundary, Igbo territory lies roughly along the Cross River as far as Latitude 6° north, and then narrows in the form of an irregular semi-circle toward the Niger. Beyond, on the west bank, is a small triangle whose base can be said to lie along the River Niger. This is the home of some 365,000 Igbo-speaking peoples, most of whom are however culturally akin to their Bini neighbours to the west. Their other neighours

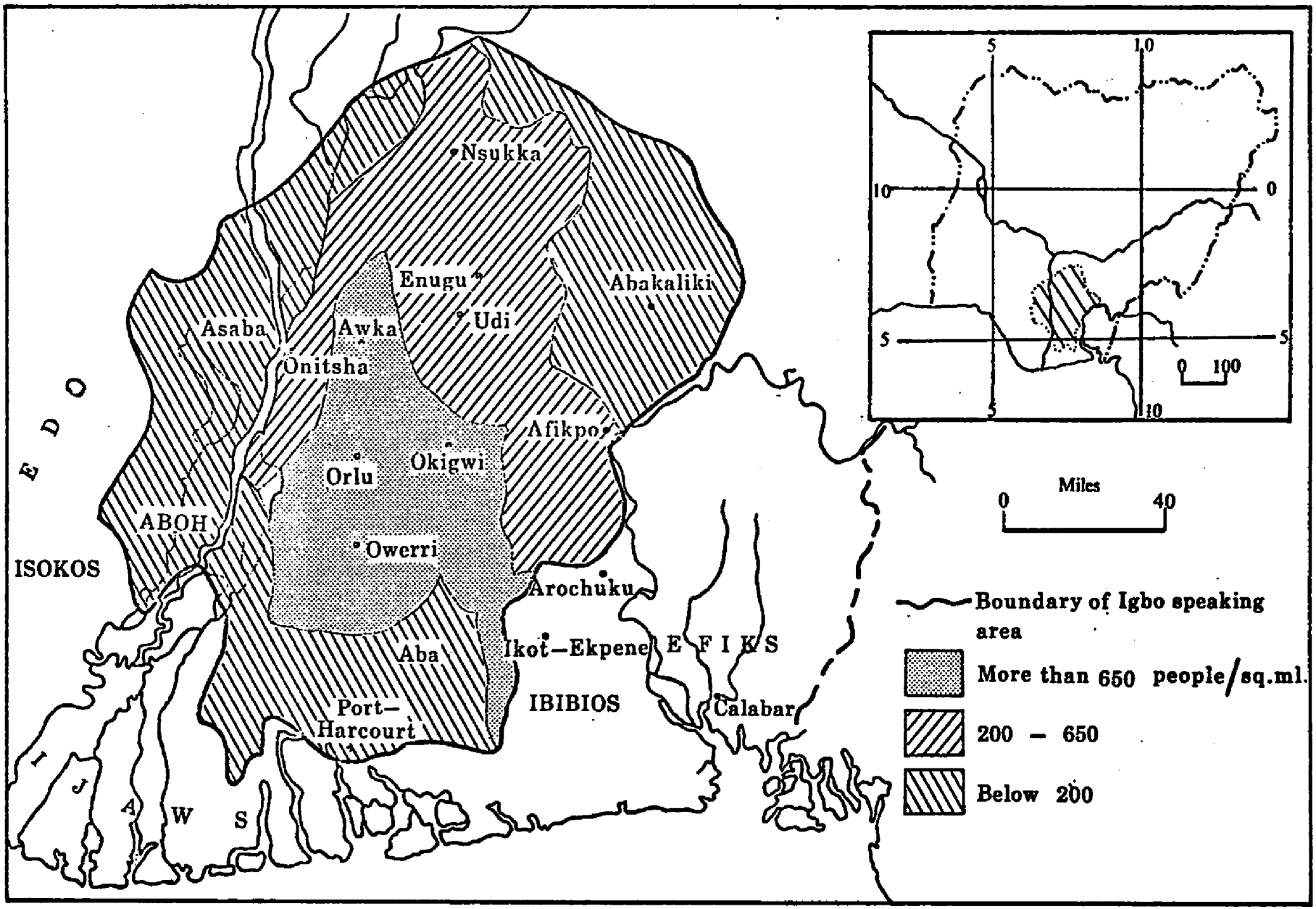


Fig. 2. Igbo-speaking areas of Southern Nigeria

are the Isoko and Urhobo to the south-west, and the Ijo directly south of them. On the eastern front, the Igbo share a common boundary with the Yako and Ibibio, while their northern neigbours are the Tiv and Igala.

Igbo country will thus be found to be unevenly cut by the River Niger, with the greater portion lying east of the river. Inspite of the contiguous character of Igbo territory, a common pool of culture and the retention of what Uchendu calls a "psychic unity", the River Niger seems to have become the great dividing line. The Igbo-speaking peoples on the west bank identify themselves as 'Western', and expect outsiders to take the distinction as seriously as though it had some genetic relevance. Part of the explanation for this is in the fact that the Niger constitues a 'natural' boundary. Another equally powerful reason is the fact that the colonial administrative boundaries of the first decade of this century took the Niger as the dividing line, and all Igbo west of it were grouped with the other ethnic groups, away from the bulk of the Igbo peoples. Whatever differences there were have been further exaggerated by the fact that the Igbo peoples fall into two separate political units or states, the East Central and the Mid-West.

But there seems to be powerful historical and cultural evidence for the distinction. Daryll Forde and G. I. Jones

in an extensive ethnographic survey of the Igbo peoples and culture split Igbo territory into five major culture areas, one of which is the Western Igbo. Within this broad category of the Western Igbo culture area are three more homogeneous sub-culture zones viz: the Northern Ika, the Southern Ika, and the Riverain Igbo.

The Aboh people who today number over 5,000 form a section of the Riverain Igbo. The latter group is confined to the Niger flood plain between the Ase Creek to the west and the Orashi to the east.[3]

It is not known to waht extent any part of the Niger flood plain could, in the past, be described as 'Aboh', for none of our early nineteenth century informants ventured beyond the metropolis of Aboh and the countries bordering the River. Quantitative data for the city are impressionistic and allow only for some intelligent guesses as to what the size of the heartland of the Aboh was. Richard and John Lander, who in 1830 became the first Europeans to set eyes on the lower Niger, described Aboh country as "immensely large", and containing "a vast population".[4] Eleven years later, Captain William Allen and Dr. T. R. Thompson reported that Aboh "is much the largest town in the Delta", and that "Obi Ossai, King of Ibu [Aboh] is therefore one of the most powerful and influential rulers on the banks of the river".[5] Baikie, much later in 1854, recorded that Aboh was "both the name of a town

as well as a district which extended along both sides of the river from the oru [Ijo] country towards Igara."[6] It is thus evident that the term Aboh originally meant more than just a town and that a considerable tract of the Niger banks north of the town was 'Aboh' in some loose sense. It was however not until 1832 that we obtain the first rough estimate of the city's population. The perceptive Macgregor Laird thought that there were as many as 6,000[7] people in Aboh town, while in 1841, Captain William estimated the population at between 7,000 and 8,000.[8]

Since the inauguration of British rule in Aboh country in 1886, traditional boundaries have been upset, and re-drawn many times over. Indeed, the regrouping of clans in response to political agitation and administrative demands has proceeded at an ever increasing rate and even as this is written, plans are near maturity for redrawing the political divisions of the Midwest State to which the Aboh belong. Therefore, the accompanying statistical table and map of Aboh Division are only intended to show the situation as it exists today, and the other Igbo-speaking peoples with whom the Aboh have been most closely associated.

The question as to how half the population of the Igbo-speaking peoples on the west bank of the River Niger came to be concentrated in Aboh Division, is one which, although relevant to this study, transcends the limited area of Aboh. It concerns the peopling of Aboh country and the entire

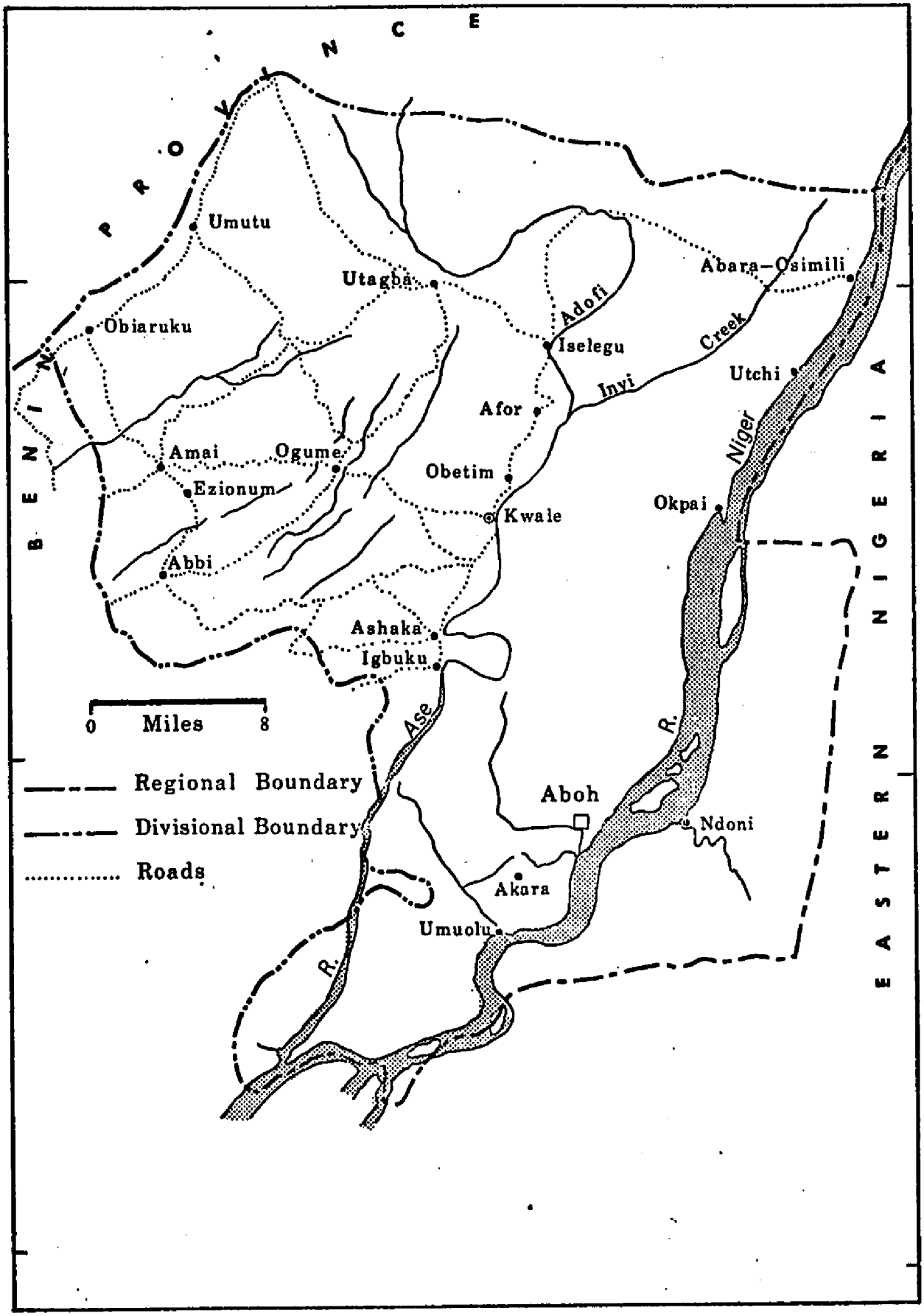


Fig. 3. Aboh Division

TABLE 1

POPULATION OF CLANS AND VILLAGES GROUPS IN ABOH DIVISION DECEMBER 1952

Clan/ Village Group	Popu- la- tion	Clan/ Village Group	Popu- la- tion	Clan/ Village Group	Popu- la- tion
Kwale Govern- ment Station	512	Abarra clan	3,398	Afor clan	3,931
		Aboh clan	5,354	Akarai V.G.	2,465
Ndoni Native Administration	1,671	Adiai clan	1,623	Ase clan	6,993
		Utchi V.G.	3,446	Obiaruku Town	7,658
Ashaka V.G.	3,761	Utuoku V.G.	647	Onicha clan	3,871
Igbuku V.G.	1,287	Ushie V.G.	1,528	Ogume clan	9,996
Inyi V.G.	1,321	Abedei clan	5,035	Umuebu V.G.	1,393
Obikwele V.G.	240	Abbi clan	7,022	Umukwata clan	5,328
Ikpai clan	2,354	Akoko clan	4,819	Umutu V.G.	4,464
Onogbokor V.G.	911	Amai clan	4,462	Utagba Ogbe VG	4,856
Onuabo V.G.	1,525	Emu clan	4,466	Utagba uno clan	7,369
Onyia V.G.	1,698	Eziokpor V.G.	3,175		
Ossissa clan	3,518	Ezionum	2,871		
Umuolu V.G.	1,299				

Division Total ---------- 130,121

Source: Nigeria, Department of Statistics, Population Census of the Western Region of Nigeria, 1952, Bulletin No. 9, (Lagos: Census Superintendent, 1953), pp. 1-7.

right bank in general. As will become evident, Aboh traditions of origin, which will form the subject of a later chapter, leave unanswered certain fundamental questions. Was the area virgin before the immigration of the Aboh? If not, what was the character of the settled population, and how and when was the area initially settled.

The peopling of Aboh, Ukwuani and Ika countries has received very scant attention, largely because there exists incredibly large gaps in the evidence historians and anthropologists have had to work with. Ethnographic studies are barely one generation old in Igbo-country and while an enviable pile of data has been collected few relate to the problem of Igbo origins. Archaeological excavation has only just begun in the Igbo heartland, and no part of the west bank has as yet been touched. Recorded traditions exist, but these were collected more than forty years ago, and are greatly in need of revision and evaluation. Those who have ventured opinions have relied wholly on the available oral evidence plus deductions from the socio-political organization of some west bank Igbo, all of which indicate a Bini extraction. Many of these traditions doubtless have a basis in fact, but it still leaves unanswered the questions set out above. Any workable hypothesis has to attempt a plausible explanation of the emergence of an Igbo-Bini culture zone west of the Niger, particularly in Aboh.

One approach to the problem is to tie it with the general although largely hypothetical question of Igbo origins and migration. All Igbo peoples occupying the territory already described speak mutually intelligible dialects of the Igbo language, which Greenberg has listed as a unique sub-group of the Kwa branch of the Niger-Congo family.[9] The Igbo, it must also be emphasized, inhabit a contiguous territory. The large number of dialects within such a compact and clearly defined territory may therefore be accounted for by the difficult rain forest vegetation and the preponderance of small segmented and isolated communities.[10] Even so, the dialectal dissimilarities must not be over-emphasized. They are no more marked than those between the Ijebu, Ijesa and Ekiti Yoruba, all of which were supposedly unified under Oyo, and thus exposed to many levelling factors.

Yet few people doubt the common origin of the Yoruba-speaking peoples who are as culturally and linguistically heterogeneous as the Igbo. While the legend of Oduduwa is now regarded as the base line of Yoruba historiography, it is actually the linguistic and cultural homogeneity at a general level that has commended the tradition for consideration and studied acceptance. Common language does not in any way establish a common origin, and an <u>a priori</u> hypothesis based on language similarities might be dangerously overstretched. However, in the absence of any strong

evidence to the contrary a common language does provide some useful clues as to a peoples' origin. At a higher level, scholars of African society are falling back on linguistic evidence, and much of the ongoing debate on the origins of the Bantu, although inconclusive, point to the great potential of linguistics for history.[11] Herbert Lewis has utilized primarily linguistic evidence to provide a more logical answer to the problem of Galla and Somali origins.[12] Lucy Mair has rightly pointed out that a people might fake their history consciously or unconsciously, but they have very little control over the language they speak. Therefore, she argues, when people who are geographically divided and politically distinct are found to speak the same language, they must have "a common past of some kind".[13] Professor Armstrong's study of the Idoma and Yoruba - two groups geographically separated from each other by other ethnic groups - suggests such common origins.[14] When, as in the case of the Igbo, the people occupy a compact territory with no intervening ethnic and linguistic groups, a common past becomes even more probable.

No claim to a common origin has been seriously advanced in behalf of the Igbo because traditions of the Oduduwa type do not exist. Igbo origins are highly speculative and it would seem that after a generation or more of doing just that, we are as little informed about the Igbo's past as when we began. The only known all-Igbo theory is

Akwaelumo Ike's use of biblical evidence to show that the Igbo are a Hebrew tribe which had migrated from Egypt into the Niger Valley during the reign of Ramesis II about 1491 B.C. According to this hypothesis, the nomadic Jews had settled near Idah in Igala where they succeeded in conquering and absorbing the indigeneous people. In time, they began to practice agriculture, and the original Hebrew became corrupted to 'Igbo'. Following an altercation, one section of the now Igbo tribe migrated southwards into present day Ghana where they form the Ga elements. Yet another group made its way north-eastwards into Ethiopia. Many years after, the main Igbo stock migrated from the Igala country into their present homeland in several small groups, pushing the aborigines further south towards the coast. Others settled on the banks of the Lower Niger, thereby making up the Onitsha, Aboh, Oguta, Osomari, etc.[15] It should be said however that this is little more than speculation.

Those who have engaged in serious research report the existence only of fragmentary sub-tribe, clan or village traditions of origin, and nothing of an all-Igbo migration. This may be due to the fact that little systematic and co-ordinated research has been carried out in the area, an exercise which is complicated by the size of Igbo country and their political decentralization. However, the absence of an all-Igbo tradition, projected against recent archaeological finds at Igbo-ukwu now carbon dated to AD 840±145

and AD 850±120,[16] indicate that the Igbo speaking peoples are descended from a proto-Igbo who have inhabited south-eastern Nigeria for a very long time. This date, it must be stressed, is older than carbon dates for the Ife-Benin finds, and actually pre-dates C. 1000 AD generally suggested for the settlement of Yoruba land by Oduduwa and his followers.

The most elaborate Igbo legends of origin--the Umundri traditions--attests to such a hypothesis. One of the earliest attempts to synthesize data on Igbo origins was that by A. G. Leonard who, while admitting the nature of the problem of Igbo origins, suggested that Nri, fifteen miles east of Onitsha could be "the original fountainhead from which all other (Igbo) clans have sprung."[17] Talbot lent his support to the Nri hypothesis, and a number of later authors have been content to quote these two men. Nri, or Umundri tradition,[18] which is institutionalized in the royal lineage and has passed down as part of the paraphanelia of the royal Ezenri cult, says that the founder Eri and his wife Namaku were both sent down to this earth by the Sky-god Chukwu. The couple had four sons, Ndri, Agulu, Agbariam and Amanukwe. A fifth son Idah, by another woman, later founded the Igala town of the same name, His eldest son Onojo Obori became a giant-warrior and scorge of the Igbo country around. Nri, the second of the sons of Eri, later migrated to found Aguku near the present site of Enugu. At the time of Nri's arrival, the tradition

emphasizes, "there were no towns in the immediate vicinity, nothing but open country" hence the settlement was called Aguku which translates as "open veld."

An Aguleri variant claims that when the sky beings Eri and Namuku alighted, the entire earth around was a morass. He complained to Chukwu who sent an Awka man equipped with bellows, charcoal and fire to dry the land. Initially, the sky beings were fed by Chukwu with azu igwe or sky food, strongly reminiscent of the period in Jewish history when manna fell from heaven. The supply, however, ceased when Eri died. Nri's plea for food was met by an order to sacrifice his eldest son and daughter. At first, Nri refused the order, but Chukwu sent down Dioka--the eponymous founder of the ichi facial cicatrisation guild--whose descendants live to this day in Umudioka (children of Dioka), who had the faces of Ndri's two children cicatrized. They were then executed and buried. Three weeks after, yams and coco-yams were harvested from the graves and thereafter distributed to all the 'world'.[18] By a similar sacrifice of a male and female slave, palm-oil and bread-fruit were obtained and again distributed. As a reward for distributing these foodstuffs, Ndri won the privilege to crown the Eze or king of Aguleri, to purify every Igbo village of a breach of taboo, as well as tying the ngwulu (ankle cords) when a man took the ozo title. He also had a monopoly of the Ogbuji or yam medicine which ensured a rich yam harvest.

The Umundri traditions recorded above present an unusual problem of interpretation. They are complex--there are other less detailed variants from other Nri villages,--and told only by the Umundri royalty of Aguleri. Igbo-speaking peoples not of the Nri web of clans have no such traditions. There is, however, in the traditions some indication that the Eri or Nri had moved into an area with a settled population. This is suggested by the "distribution of yams and coco yams" to the 'world', an obvious reference to their neighbours. It is also possible that the traditions veils the introduction of agriculture and iron technology into this part of the tropical forest. For example, Northcote Thomas whose Anthropological Report on the Igbo appeared in 1913, recorded an Umundri tradition which claimed that until they arrived in the country, the aborigines practised a hunting and gathering economy,[20] not unlike the Bushmen of Southern Africa and the Pygmies of the Ituri forest of the Congo. If this is a valid assumption, there can be little doubt that the Igbo have been settled in this region for a considerable time. It is perhaps no coincidence that the Awka of the Nri web of clans have been and still are the foremost clan of blacksmiths in Igbo country.

When the Igbo settlement of the Nri country occurred can only be guessed. Indeed, R. E. Bradbury discountenanced any suggestion that the Igbo language was 'carried' into the area from far afield. While conceding that the technique of glotto chronology is too crude to admit of any

claim to accuracy, he quotes Professor R. Armstrong's hypothesis that the Kwa languages of Ibo, Edo and Yoruba started diverging supposedly in the same general area, "not much less than 4,000 years ago". Bradbury does not discount the influence of external stimuli or incursions by other groups, but such immigrants "were linguistically absorbed and .... such innovations as they brought were reinterpreted in the climate of the aboriginal cultures." Bradbury goes on to argue that the:

> Benin, Ibo and Yoruba culture, as we know them today, are certainly the produce of a long process of development within what is today Nigeria. Moreover they must already have been clearly differentiated from each other at the earliest period to which oral traditions can be assumed to refer.[21]

Thus, the Umundri may have been an intrustive group who subjugated or mixed with the indigeneous Igbo peoples of this region. Indeed, this hypothesis is borne out by the re-enactment of an Umundri ritual prayer, part of which says, "Ofo anyi ji eli igbo", meaning "the ofo or sacred emblem with which we conquered the Igbo".[22] This event may have occurred sometime in the first millenium AD. The Igbo Ukwu bronzes appear to be associated with the Eze Nri royal treasure houses and the fact that they date to the ninth century AD indicate that there was a flourishing artistic culture in Igbo country, at least in the Nri area, about this time.

Jeffreys has argued that the Umundri tradition is best understood as

> an oral dramatization of the ritual ... [which ensures]... the fertility of the land; rather than ... an historical description of the sudden and startling arrival among a food gathering community of a cult with its sacred emblem of the ofo and a high degree of civilization which included a knowledge of agriculture and metal working.23

While this is possible, it must be stressed that oral traditions have too often been received with guarded skepticism in learned circles. Oral traditions are not without value for serious historical studies, and at this stage of our knowledge of Igo history it is necessary to keep an open mind on alternatives. There is a great similarity between the Umundri and Yoruba traditions, and the former does have a great potential for development. One reason it has not become 'the' Igbo tradition of origin as the Oduduwa legend has for the Yoruba, is probably not unconnected with Igbo ecology. The Yoruba are an urban people, a phenomenon which facilitates the spread of myths. Living in small isolated communities, as the Igbo do, it was difficult for traditions of one group to spread.

J. D. Boston has examined Igala traditions and comes to the conclusion that there are strong Igala influences in parts of Igbo country, notably in the Nri country where the local traditions also talk of connexion with Igala.[24] Evidence of Igala influence in the Riverain Igbo country also exists. Thus Boston recorded that Ossomari on the left bank above Onitsha had been "peopled by the Igala originally as a trading station market." Besides Ossomari, the Igala also claim to have founded Okpai, Onya, Umuolu, Ndoni and Aboh. Whether or not these traditions refer to

accretion of Igala elements into an already existing Igbo population is not expressly stated, but this would appear to be the case. As Boston himself admits, these Igala traditions are not confirmed by parallel traditions from some of these towns.

The more pertinent Igbo-Igala relation concerns the Nri Igbo. The Northern Nri villages of Aguleri, Nteje, Amanukwe and Igbariam, according to Boston, claim to have been founded by an Igala hunter or warrior by name Eri who had migrated south to the region of the Anambra River. Aguleri, according to Boston, was named for Eri's second son Agulu, but the ruling family of Aguleri trace their own descent from one Aguve, who went to Idah to receive the Eze title from the Atah.[25] Note however that while the Southern Nri agree that Eri was their ancestor, they nevertheless insist that he came from the sky and that one of his sons founded Idah. The significance of this version (as Boston noted) is that the Igala are represented as half-brothers of the Umueri Igbo and not their ancestors. Like Jeffreys, he concludes that the Southern Nri traditions are a religious charter but concedes that the traditions of the Northern Nri are more historically accurate.

Most of the group of villages in the Nsukka Division south east of Igala also share a common tradition of subjection to Igala. According to C. K. Meek who conducted extensive research in the Nsukka area in the 1930s, most of the Division as far south as Opi, about 40 miles from Enugu,

was at one time overrun by an Igala chieftain Onu (chief) Ojo Ogbonyi who lived in the upper Anambra. Such a conquest does however suggest that the Igbo were already settled in the area. An Nri tradition, it must be remembered, mention Onu Ojo Ogbonyi as the son of Idah, the fifth son of Eri, who had founded Idah town. There is however some evidence that Onu Ojo Obgonyi was not only a historical figure, his father was probably of Igbo origin, hence inspite of his powers, he could not be made an Attah.[26] The Nsukka complex of villages was either ruled directly by the Attah of Igala or given over as a fief to the Ashadu of Igala one of the kingmakers and these two between them appointed local Igbo as Eze or Chief.

The picture is however obscured by an Igala tradition which states that the first Ashadu of Igala was an Igbo immigrant who "built up a following among the indigeneous population before the present ruling dynasty was established in Idah."[27] If so, the Southern Nri traditions of an earlier Igbo migration to Idah has implications worth exploring further.[28] Jeffrey's analysis of the coronation rituals of the Eze Nri and Attah Igala show that they share a great deal in common, and may have been derived from a common pool.[29] It is of some significance that a version of the Nri tradition asserts that when an Attah of Idah is crowned, "an Ndri man has to be there to put the crown on his head". Jeffreys notes however that the Attah also claims to bestow nobility on the Igbo towns near Idah and

is therefore unlikely that he dons his crown today only in the presence of an Nri man. The most that can be said is that there is some recognized mutual relationship or even common origin.[30] Only further research can indicate in which direction culture diffused.

Of relevance to the settlement of Western Igbo and Aboh country are the many traditions of Igala and eastern Igbo contact before or after the coming of Bini immigrants. The Riverain Igbo have understandably been most exposed to Igala influence. Of the twenty three clans or village groups into which this sub-culture area was subdivided by Daryll Forde and G. I. Jones, ten communities have traditions of direct migration from across the Niger, principally from Nri.[31] Of these, three also claim a mixed Bini and Igala origin.[32] Only three claim exclusive Bini origins.[33] There are no data for the nine remaining groups. Presumably these were exclusively Igbo communities with no traditions from either Igala or Benin.[34] Note however the already mentioned claim of the Igala to the founding of Aboh, Ndoni, Umuolu, Okpai and Onya, which are not mentioned by G. I. Jones and D. Forde.

In the northern Ika culture zone, (see map on p. 55) nine communities claim to have been founded exclusively by migrants from Benin. Three of these communities, however connect their migration with Chima who also founded Onitsha.[35] Six claim exclusive Igbo origins, the majority of whom came

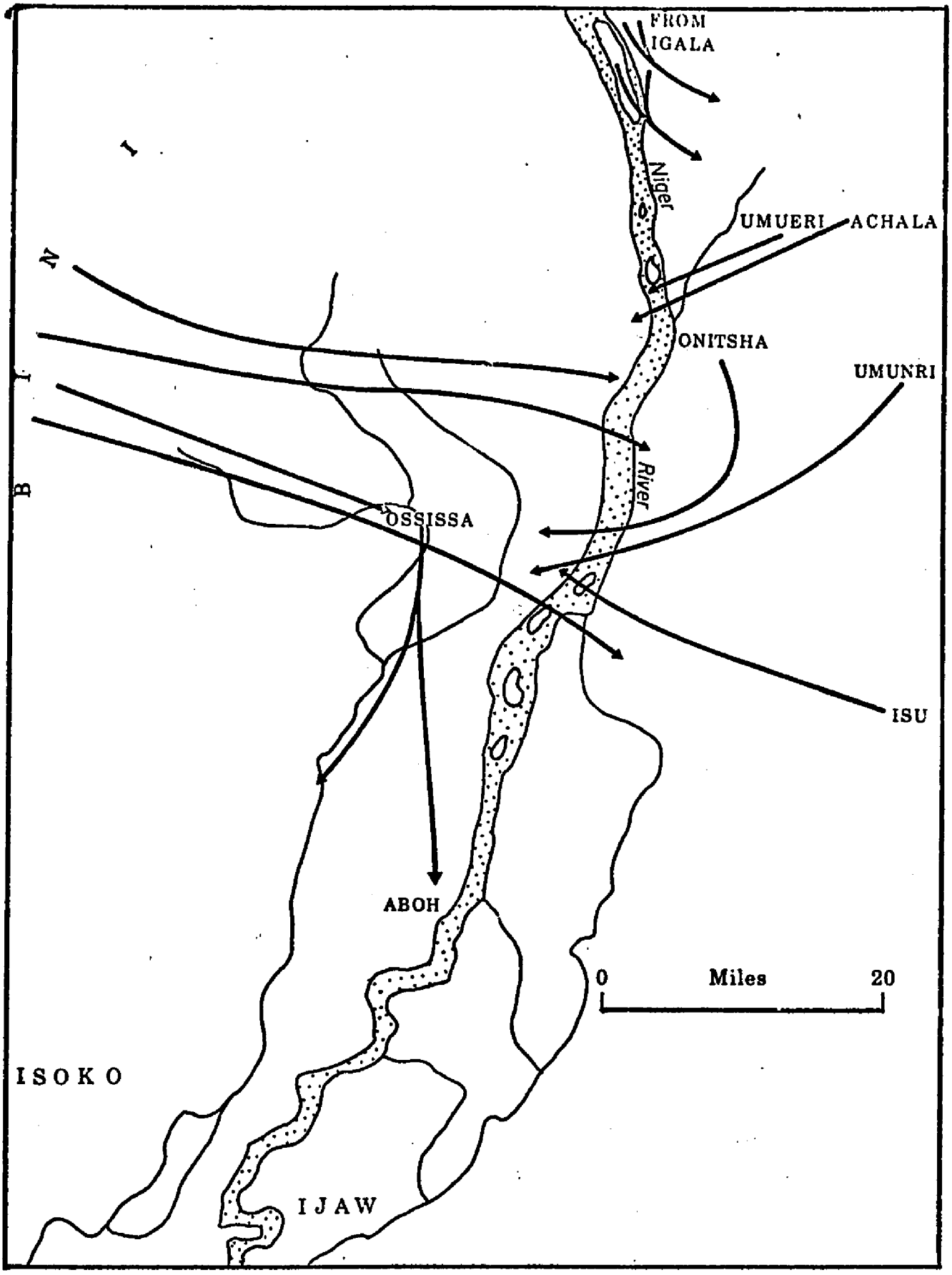


Fig. 4. Riverain Igbo Traditions of Origin

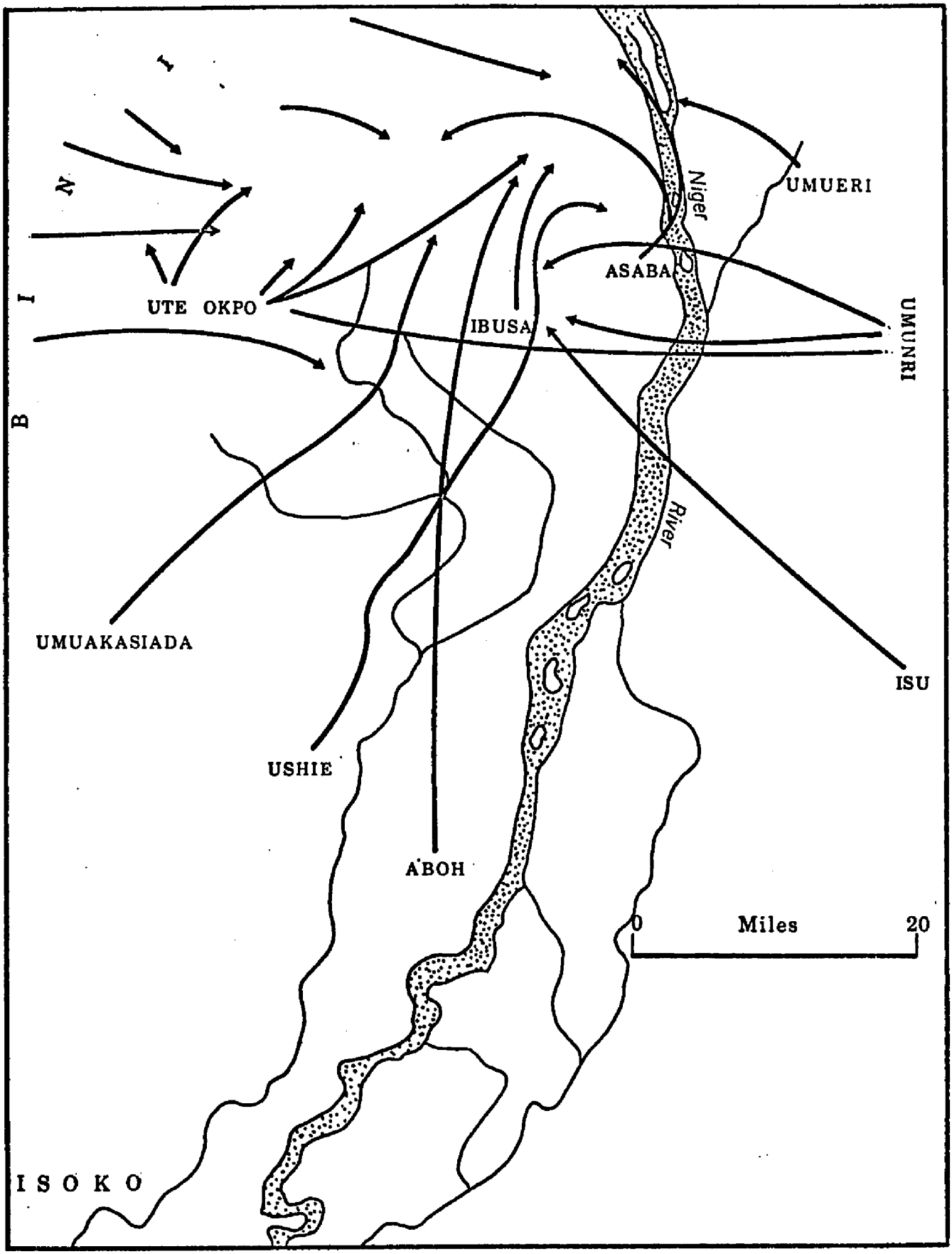


Fig. 5. Northern Ika Traditions of Origin

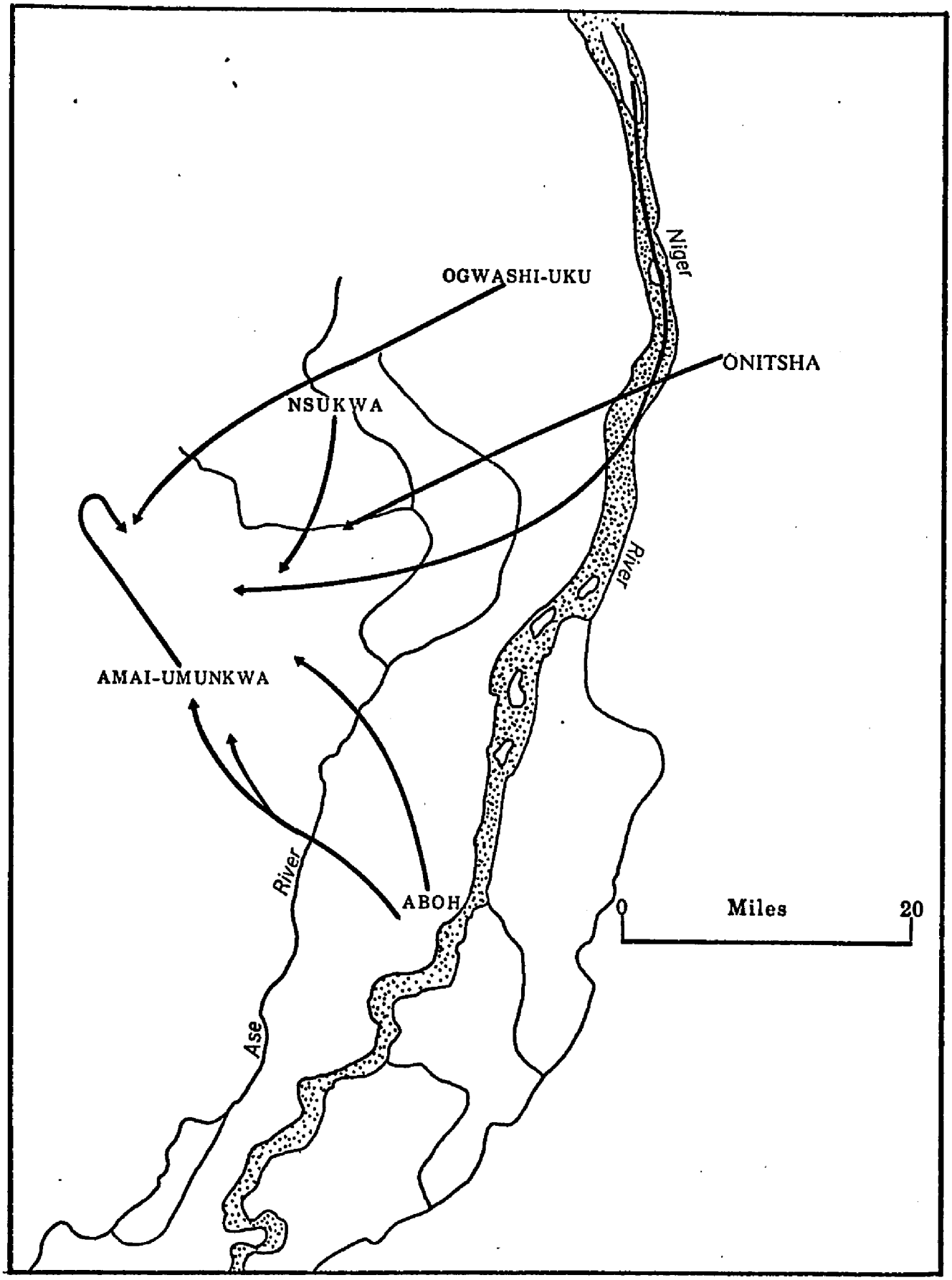


Fig. 6. Ukwuani or Southern Ika Traditions of Origin

in from Nri.[36] Four are mixed Igbo and Benin[37] while one is exclusively Yoruba and another exclusively Ishan.[38] It is not perhaps insignificant that there exists little or no traditions of Igala origins among this group. It is also obvious that the population is so mixed to really talk of a common origin. It seems significant also that traditions of Benin ancestry are stronger and more widespread nearer Benin just as Igbo traditions get stronger towards the Niger.

The traditions of the Southern Ika or Ukwuani are more mixed and less precise. (See map on p. 56). Most clans claim a Bini descent while a few mention infiltration from Urhobo country to the east and Igala. A good number of the communities show evidence of a secondary settlement from areas of older Igbo settlements.[39]

Both the Umundri traditions and the quantitative analysis of community traditions among the western Igbo present complex problems of interpretation. They indicate, however, that from a core area of Awka and Orlu which includes the Nri country, Igbo-speaking peoples have dispersed outwards in several directions, including the west bank of the Niger, before the expansion of the Bini.[40] This expansion was probably the result of population growth consequent upon an 'agricultural revolution' dimly foretold by the Nri tradition and perhaps not unconnected with the spread into the region of Asian food crops. Henderson has also advanced

the theory that long before the traditions of Bini origins of some Western Igbo, Northern Igbo influence had spread through migration across the Niger, only to be driven backwards by the rise of Benin power in the fifteenth century and after.[41]

It has been customary to regard the entire country west of the Niger as 'Edo territory', and that the Niger River constituted a kind of 'frozen' boundary. The whole region was, according to this hypothesis, originally settled by Edo speaking peoples who later experienced an influx of Igbo population from across the Niger, leading to the complete disappearance of the Bini tongue.[42] That this hypothesis is not borne out by available evidence is attested by demographic and ethnographic data. First, it is perhaps no coincidence that the Awka--Owerri--Nri region which is suggested as the point of migration, and which Victor Uchendu describes as "nuclear Igboland" is the most heavily populated area in all Igboland.[43] (See map on p. 37.) While the militarism of the Benin kingdom seem to have been firmly established, it has in no way been proven that her expansion in and after the fifteenth century was due to population pressure within the Edo heartland. Her expansion was essentially political, and as such the emphasis was far more on territorial control than on colonization. On the other hand, from what is known of Igbo migrations even in recent times, it might be suggested that Igbo country has for a considerable time been subjected to population

pressures and allied incentives to migrate. For example, the 1921 census, the first in the country, showed that Owerri Province had the densest population in Nigeria with a total of 596 persons per square mile. Awka followed with 324. By comparison, Benin Division, from which all of Igbo country west of the Niger was said to have been peopled, recorded a meagre 23 persons per square mile.[44] Population increase in Igboland would appear to be a historical problem for by the 1950s the density per square mile in the Awka-Mbaise axis had exceeded the staggering figure of 1,000. This makes the greater part of Igbo country one of the most densely populated rural areas in the world. Although the technique of demographic history is yet in its infancy, there would appear to be some rationale here for supporting Sapir's contention that a thicker concentration of population in an area argues for a longer occupation.[45]

The point needs emphasizing that the west bank Igbo are of diverse origins, and, in an area where it is fashionable and indeed prestigious to claim a Bini ancestry, a large number of settlements still retain memories of migrations from across the Niger. That this memory has persisted in spite of the incorporation of most of the people in the centralized kingdom of Benin is indeed significant. Almost everywhere, the traditions emphasize that an 'Igbo people' was met in the place by the later Bini layer. The Aboh in particular insist that the original inhabitants of their

city were the Akarai Igbo while the Onitsha mention the Oze with whom the Bini immigrants no doubt intermarried.[46] Ndoni which Igala traditions lay claim to, unequivocally state that its founders moved into the Niger bank from Utafi further east. Whether the Akarai in the Aboh tradition were originally from Nri-Akwa zone is a question that further research will provide an answer to.

Further more, while Bini admixture and cultural features are almost everywhere present, the latter are among the Western Igbo, largely restricted to political institutions. Both the language and most of the cultural pattern remain Igbo. This suggests that Bini influence was restricted to political offices and chieftaincy titles. In this regard, it might be well to point out that there does not exist a markedly transitional language zone in the Igbo areas bordering the Edo. The gradient here is steep, actually more so than one finds in Igbo countries bordering the Urhobo and Ijo. The point here is that Igbo culture and language is too deep and compact inside the west bank to be explained away in terms of a settled Bini population later exposed to Igbo influence. For example, the Urhobo who like the Aboh lay claim to Bini origin show this in their markedly Edo influenced language. It is also interesting to note that the Itsekiri who are more culturally and historically related to Benin show their Yoruba ancestry in their language, which is in reality a dialect of Yoruba.[47] In recent times, the Isoko village groups of Igbuku, Ibrede,

Anyama, Enwe, Igbuku, Ume, etc. which have resulted from a fusion of Igbo, Urhobo and Bini elements, reveal this heterogeneity in their language form. Most Isoko peoples bordering Aboh are bilingual. Again, three of the northern Ika village groups of Odiani--Ikwugu, Idumogo and Uburubu--all of which claim to have been founded by a Yoruba by the name of Orogbuda, to this day speak the Akua dialect of Yoruba as a second language.[48] As far as is known, no Igbo-speaking peoples west of the Niger, not even the Ika who are closest to the Bini, speak an Edo language. In Issele Ukwu, it is reported that a variant of Bini is spoken at court, but this form of language is restricted to specialists and uttered only on special ritual ceremonies.[49]

The conclusion then is that all Igbo country west of the Niger - the so called Western Ibo - had been settled by Igbo-speaking elements who fanned out from the Awka-Nri zone at a very early date. M. A. B. Delap in an excellent paper on Igbo origins suggests that Igbo expansion west of the Niger could be as early as the tenth century AD[50], or at least accomplished by the fourteenth century AD. However, any attempt to fix even an approximate date for this movement is entirely speculative. In all probability, Igbo occupation of the west bank occurred much earlier than the tenth century AD, and could be so old that the present Igbo populations have lost all memories of it. This probably accounts for the fact that traditions of origins from

across the Niger is not as widespread and certainly does not correlate with the linguistic evidence. That Bini traditions are more detailed, and in areas more profuse, points to the relative lateness of this second movement as against an earlier migration from Igbo proper. Some Igala also settled amongst them before the fifteenth century and after when these Igbo communities became subjected to varying degrees of Bini influence.

Sometimes such influence was militaristic, but more often, it was through a process of peaceful immigration and commercial contact. The numerically inferior Bini were in places guaranteed political ascendancy by the prestige and prowess of their 'kingdom' and most local princes no doubt sought to link their lineages with the Bini in order to obtain greater prestige and authority. Others spurn traditions of origin from Benin. But the Bini were absorbed in the mainstream of the dominant Igbo culture and language. In this 'melting pot' environment, as our study of Aboh will reveal, new cultural systems were worked out which in the end would be neither Igbo nor Bini, yet containing elements from both.

NOTES

[1]The variant Ibo which is encountered more in the literature is doubtlessly an anglicization of Igbo, by which the rural member of this ethnic group identified himself. The change is similar to that which has occurred in the English rendition of African names. Thus the coastal Izo have been called Ijaw, the Urhobo, Sobo, and the Itsekiri, Jekri. This was principally due to difficulties expatriates experience in pronouncing local names. It should however be observed that most literate Igbo prefer and use the word Ibo to describe themselves and the group. In this work the original Igbo is used.

[2]G. I. Jones and D. Forde both stressed the point that until the advent of the Europeans, the Igbo had no common name, the various village groups or clans being identified by the name of a putative ancestral founder viz: Aro, Edda, Ndokko, Isu etc. One of the major criteria for classifying the Igbo as a tribe or a single group is linguistic. This also applies to other ethnic classification all over the world. It is however truer for the Igbo who possess no tradition of common origin, and lack any form of centralized power. For those interested in seeking 'a general pattern' the Igbo present marked cultural and linguistic variation which pose real difficulties. As Uchendu and others observed, there is even an unwillingness on the part of some members of the group to be identified as Igbo. He cities the example of the Onitsha, Nri and Oguta who claim not to be Igbo, and using the term for their "less cultured" neighbours. As early as 1854, an Onitsha prince Odiri told Crowther that the name Igbo was erroneously applied to them by the Igala and that it was actually the name of the Inam north of Onitsha. The Aboh are another case. They regard themselves as 'Aboh' simple and not Igbo. Indeed the word 'Igbo' among the Aboh is a polite synonym for slave, and any indiscriminate or abusive use of the term is immediately translated as slave, and likely to start trouble.

The origin of the term Igbo is even more obscure than the history of the people. Akwaelumo Ike in his Origins of the Ibos suggests that it is a corruption of Hebrew. According to G. I. Jones and D. Forde, Igbo was used "among the people themselves as a term of contempt by the Riverain Ibo for their hinterland congeners". C. K. Meek suggests that it probably meant "The People", embodying the Sudanic root--bo or po . The Ife still tell traditions of wars with the Igbo, whom they succeeded in driving away from Yoruba country through the heroism of a woman called Moremi. But whether or not the Igbo in this tradition has any relation to the Igbo people is a moot question. Could it

have referred to a time when the Igbo people spread as far west as Yoruba country?

Jeffreys considers that Igbo originally meant 'forest dwellers' and as a secondary or derived meaning 'slaves.' It is to be observed that the Igala term for slave is onigbo, oni meaning 'man' and -gbo 'slave'. Meek's suggestion that Igbo could mean 'the people' is not borne out by linguistic data for the Igbo word for 'the people' is ndi. Of course, the Sudanic bo may have been in use earlier, but this seems far fetched. It is interesting to note that more people ascribe the origin of the term to the Igala with whom the Igbo claim some connections.

The first European mention of Igbo was in 1627 by Sandoval. Later in 1699 Barbot reported that the 'Hackbouts' (Igbo) of the Rio Real interior raid their neighbours for slaves which the 'Calabar Blacks' purchase on regular market days. By the 1790s' the use of the term Igbo was becoming more widespread. Captain Adams reported that 16,000 of the 20,000 slaves sold annually at Bonny were "natives of one nation, Heebo"(Igbo). Thus by the end of the eighteenth century it had come to apply to the collection of some 2,000 clans and village groups living behind the Delta coastline. This survey is based on material drawn from the following sources: D. Forde and G. I. Jones, The Ibo and Ibibio Speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria (Ethnographic Survey of Africa; West Africa, 3, London, 1950), p. 9; V. C. Uchendu, The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria (New York, 1965) p. 3; A. Ike, The Origin of the Ibos (Onitsha, 1959), p. 13; C. K. Meek, Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe (London, 1937), p.i. P. E. Hair, "Ethnolinguistic Continuity on the Guinea Coast", Journal of African History, 8, 2 (1967), 247-268; P. A. Talbot, The Peoples of Southern Nigeria, 4 Vols. London, 1926, 1. p. 245, 249-250. F. Willett, Ife in the History of West African Sculpture (New York, 1967), pp. 122-3; D. Jeffreys, "The Umundri Tradition of Origin", African Studies, 15, 3 (1956), p. 127.

[3]Forde and Jones, op. cit., pp. 9-10. The other four culture areas are Northern or Onitsha Ibo, Southern or Owerri Ibo, Eastern or Cross River Ibo and the North-Eastern Ibo.

[4]R. and J. Lander, Journal of an Expedition to Explore the Course and Termination of the Niger, 2 Vols. (New York, 1858), 2, p. 218.

[5]W. Allen and T. R. Thomson, A Narrative of the Expedition ... to the River Niger in 1841, 2 Vols. (London, 1848), 1, pp. 239-40.

[6]W. B. Baikie, op. cit., p. 50.

[7]M. Laird and R. A. K. Oldfield, Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa by the River Niger, 2 Vols. (London, 1837), p. 102.

[8]Allen and Thomson, op. cit., 1, p. 239.

[9]J. Greenberg, The Languages of Africa(Bloomington, 1966), p. 8.

[10]Forde and Jones, op. cit., p. 11.

[11]Among linguistic studies on the Bantu expansion are J. H. Greenberg, Studies in African Linguistic Classification (New Haven, 1965), M. Gouthrie, "Some developments in the pre-history of the Bantu language", Journal of African History, 3 (1963), 273-82; R. Oliver, "The Problems of the Bantu Expansion", Journal of African History, 7, 3(1966), 361-376; Jean Hiernaux, "Bantu Expansion: the evidence from physical Anthropology confronted with linguistic and Archaeological evidence", Journal of African History, 9, 4(1968), 505-515.

[12]H. Lewis, "The Origins of the Galla and Somali", Journal of African History, 7, 1(1966), pp. 27-46. See also Bruce Trigger, "The languages of the Northern Sudan: An Historical Perspective", Journal of African History, 7, 1(1966), pp. 19-25.

[13]L. P. Mair, Primitive Government (London, 1964), p. 127.

[14]R. G. Armstrong, "The Use of Linguistic and ethnographic data in the Study of Idoma and Yomba History", Vansina et al, The Historian in Tropical Africa (Oxford 1964), pp. 127-138.

[15]A. Ike, op. cit., pp. 9-16.

[16]T. Shaw, "Bronzes from Eastern Nigeria", Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria, 2, 1(1960), 162-5. See also, "Further Escavations at Igbo-Ukwu", Man, 2, No. 217, (1965); "Field Research in Nigerian Archaeology", Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, 2, 4(1963), 448-460 and "Research Notes" Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria", 3, 2(1967) p. 749. For a of summary of Shaw's findings, see Willett, Ife in the History of West African Sculpture, p. 175.

[17]A. G. Leonard, op. cit., p. 31.

[18]This section on the Umundri tradition draws heavily from M. D. W. Jeffreys, "The Umundri Tradition of Origin", pp. 119-131. There are variants of this tradition in N. Thomas, Anthropological Report on the Ibo-speaking Peoples of Nigeria, 5 Vols., London, 1913, 1, pp. 50-51. See also pp. 137-8.

[19]It is of some interest to note that a kind of re-enactment of this aspect of Nri history continues to this day. According to Jeffreys, "when a man takes up the post of Eze Nri he does not have to kill his first born son and daughter, though both are still marked with 'chi' marks in remembrance of this time ..."

[20]Quoted in Jeffreys, "The Unumdri tradition of Origin", p. 127.

[21]R. E. Bradbury, "The Historical Use of Comparative Ethnographic with Special Reference to Benin and the Yoruba", Vansina et al, op. cit., p. 150.

[22]Ibid., pp. 128-9.

[23]Jeffrey's hypothesis is based on the assumption that the Eze of Nri was intimately connected with crops. In other words the death of the first Eze (Eri) meant that there was literally speaking no crops since the fertility of the soil disappeared with the deceased king. "There can be no new crops until a new king comes and brings the gift of food and fertility with him", an event which occurred with the ascension of Ndri as Eze.

[24]J. S. Boston, "Notes on Contact between the Igala and the Ibo", Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, 2(1960), 52-8.

[25]M. C. Idigo, The History of Aguleri (Yaba, 1955), J. Nzekwu, "Gloria Ibo", Nigeria Magazine, 64(1960), cited in Boston, "Notes on Contact Between the Igala and the Ibo", p. 55.

[26]Seton, R. S. "Installation of an Attah of Idah", Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 58(1928), 58(1928, p. 259.

[27]M. Clifford, "A Nigerian Chiefdom", Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, LXVI (1936), cited in Boston, "Notes on Contact Between the Igala and Ibo", p. 57.

[28]Boston's analysis of the pre-dynastic period of Igala society is of some interest from the perspective of this Ibo tradition. While admitting some confusion in the preserved list of 25 kings, Boston suggests that Igala traditions operated in a linear progression for the last 22 kings on the list, a hypothesis confirmed by the evidence from the royal cemetry where there are also 22 graves. The first three names merely telescopes the three early stages of Igala society. The first of this Abutu **Eje** probably refers to a period when the segmented and semi-independent Igala Mela clans were brought together under the rule of an intrustive royal group. The second name Ebele Jonu is a reference to a female Ata who married the first Achadu and leader of the Igala Mela aborigines. The Achadu have since become, no doubt the reflection of an actual process of history, one of the most important of Igala 'kingmakers' with very great influence over the throne.

If the Igala traditions of the first Achadu being an Immigrant Igbo "who built up a following among the indigeneous population before the present ruling dynasty was established", be projected against this background, it becomes evident that Igbo-Igala relations is a far more complex problem than is generally thought.

[29]c.f. Jeffreys, "The Divine Umundri King", Africa, 8(July, 1935), 346-354, and Seton, Installation of an Attah of Idah", pp. 255-278.

[30]Feffreys, "The Umundri tradition of Origin", pp. 124-5.

[31]These are Nzam, with 11 villages, 5 of these claim Nri-Awka ancestry, but 5 others claim Igala origins; Anam from Nri-Awka; Asaba from Achalla and Nteje; Utchi from Nri and Onuabo, Ndoni from Utafi in Ahaoda, and Abarra.

[32]Oko, Atani, and Ossomari.

[33]Ossissa, Afor, Aboh.

[34]Most of these villages have traditions of settlement, no doubt secondary, from other Isoko and Igbo-towns and villages in the neighborhood. Among these are Usie, Ase, Umuabarra Utchi.

[35]Agbor, Akumazi, Otolokpu, Igbodo, Mbiri, Umunede Ezechima, Usukwa, and Idumuje. Those who claim Ezechima origins are Agbor, Ute Okpu where there is also an Nri tradition, and Ezechima.

[36]Abavo, Ogwashi Ukwu, Okpanam Ibusa and Owa.

[37]Idumuje Uno and Idumje Ugboko, Illah. In Illah, there are five hamlets from Nteje in northern Igbo, 2 from Idah and 1 from Benin; Owa, and Akuku Atuma.

[38]The Ishan originated village is Idumu Asa while the Yoruba group is Odiani. However, three villages of the later group--Ugbodu, Ugboba and Adogo claim Ishan ancestry, while one, Oburukpa claims Ezechima

[39]See the breakdown of these clan and village traditions in Forde and Jones, op. cit., pp. 45-51.

[40]P. Talbot and H. Mulhall, The Physical Anthropology of Southern Nigeria, (Cambridge, 1962), p. 4. See also Jones, The Trading States of the Oil Rivers, pp. 30-31, and Uchendu, op. cit., pp. 2-3.

[41]R. N. Henderson, "A Case Study in the Analysis of Kingship, Age-grades, and Segmentary Lineage Systems", (Ph.D. dissertation, U. C. Berkeley, 1963), p. 441. cited in M.D. Delap, "Ibo Origins" (unpublished paper, 1969), p. 57n.

[42]This view is entertained by Mr. S. B. Omoregie, a Bini official of the Ministry of Education, Mid-west State, who has engaged in some research into Benin history.

[43]Uchendu, op. cit., p. 2.

[44]Talbot, The Peoples of Southern Nigeria, IV, p. 9.

[45]E. Sapir, "Time Perspective in Aboriginal American Culture. A Study in Method", Selected Writings of Edward Sapir (ed.) D. C. Mendelbaum, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 399.

[46]Nnamdi Azikiwe, "Fragments of Onitsha History", The Journal of Negro History, 15(1930), 474-497.

[47]P. C. Lloyd, "The Itsekiri in the Nineteenth Century; an Outline Social History", Journal of African History, 4, 2 (1963), p. 209.

[48]Forde and Jones, op. cit., p. 48.

[49]An interview with Mrs. Victoria Nwabuoku, from Issele Ukwu, and currently resident in New York City.

[50]Delap, op. cit., p. 30.

CHAPTER THREE

ABOH SOCIETY

Benin has a particularly strong emotional appeal for the people of Aboh. They rarely consider the word 'Aboh' sufficiently descriptive of their identity until the suffice idu i.e. Bini is added. Thus, the Aboh always refer to themselves as 'Aboh Idu'[1] i.e. "Aboh of Benin". To their Ijo neighbors, their capital city was 'Aboh ba' or 'Aboh Ku' which mean 'Great Aboh', while the Igala knew the city and the people as 'opu'. Until 1854 the city was known to the outside world as 'Eboe' or 'Ibu' and was generally thought to be the capital of the whole Igbo ethnic group.[2] Although this proved to be a mistake, the city of Aboh was a port of trade of considerable importance, and the administrative center of a powerful kingdom on the Niger.

Although strategically located on the bank of the River Niger, much of Aboh country is geographically handicapped. Except during the flood season when the Niger overflows its banks, access to Aboh and communication with neighboring areas is beset with great difficulty. Even at flood times, the waterways are neither well defined nor easy of access, and transportation by dug out canoes is undertaken at grave peril. Canoes have to cut their path through the thick tropical forest undergrowth

and, in this endeavor, they not infrequently run aground or are wrecked on snags. The only seasonal through communication with areas to the north-west is the ofobo, itself a nine-mile stretch of swamp, muddy pools, and snags.[3]

The city of Aboh is itself adversely affected by the general low-lying character of the southern portion of the Niger flood plain. About April, the abu oji (lit. black tide) commences, and the Niger rises tardily but drops shortly after to low ebb. The main flood, which the Aboh call abu ocha (lit. white tide) or iju (flood), begins about the middle of June. By October, the River reaches its highest point when the water level may rise by over thirty feet. During the worst part of this season, most of the city is under water, in places, by as much as five feet. The flood begins to recede about the middle of October, leaving the town dry but marshy by January. This annual cycle has affected the culture of the people in many ways. For example, the agricultural cycle of planting and harvesting is patterned after it. Lakes and ponds are fished only after the annual floods, when a large catch is expected, and all the 'national' festivals and ritual ceremonies are scheduled for the dry season. Even the very notion of time is influenced by it.

Although the people seem to like the companionship of the floods, because the approach of the dry season was marked with much illness, visitors to the city found it

depressing. In August, 1841 when Captain Trotter led his expedition to Aboh, the floods had barely begun. Yet the Reverend Frederick Schon found the town "almost entirely under water". "We were obliged," he tells us, "to wade through the mud up to our knees to the palace of the king". Schon further noted that the citizens were exposed to severe health dangers after October when the water begins to dry for the quantity of mud accumulated was so enormous that dryness is not easily accomplished.[4] It seems puzzling therefore that the Aboh people elected to live under such seasonal hardships and insalubrious environment. Part of the reason is to be found in the fact that no drier spot on the Niger offered the commercial advantages of Aboh.

And partly for commercial and drainage reasons, the Aboh actually confounded the problems posed by the annual inundation by deliberately distorting the landscape. The plaza or main street which runs through the length of the city, parallel to the Aboh creek, is itself a deep 'canal' during the floods. Leading from the creek and connecting the plaza to the various sectors and compounds of the principal men are lateral branches or creeklets which had been dug on purpose to enable war and trading canoes berth near the houses.[5] The Reverend, later Bishop Samuel Crowther, whose objective was to seek locations for missionary work along the Niger, was partly alienated by this factor.

> "The greatest disadvantage of Aboh", he wrote, "is the creeks formed up their streets at the rising of the river. The people themselves help much towards it by digging clay in the street. Thus what was before regular streets are now nothing but so many small creeks through the town. Moreover, they widen and deepen the streets that canoes may be brought nearer to their houses at high water."[6]

By and large, the people seem to have met the challenges of their environmental problems posed by the annual floods.[7] This is reflected, for example, in the pattern of settlement and in the overall architectural techniques. Considerable care was exercised over the choice of house sites. Homesteads were clustered together on extended mounds, thereby reducing , although not entirely eliminating, the dangers of overflooding. Even so, extra measures were resorted to in order to ensure that houses were kept above flood level. In the nineteenth century, visitors to Aboh observed that some houses were built on strong wooden pillars four to eight feet high,[8] but the more commom practice was to erect the houses on clay platforms or nkponkpo, some of which are as high as four feet. Generally speaking, a prospective builder sought out a house ruin on the patrilineage cluster, and, usually, this was not difficult to come by. Owing to the practice of building repeatedly on ruins, such sites provided the best foil against the flood. In the unlikely event that no ruins existed, however, one was laboriously built up by transporting loads of clay to the

site. Fortunately this task does not present any serious problems since building labor is communal, the only obligation being the provision of meals, kola nuts and drinks.

These flood-control houses were the objects of admiration in the nineteenth century. Richard and John Lander reported that they were "neatly built of yellow clay, plastered over, and thatched with palm-leaves." Enough space was found behind the houses for a fenced-in garden in which plantains, bananas, coca and some vegetables were cultivated. [9]

The architectural design of the houses of the nobility was conspicuously different from that of the commonality. This was the obulu--a quadrangular court in which a large number of rooms opened into a narrow verandah which extended through all the four sides of the structure. It was roofed in such a manner as to leave a narrow rectangle in the center open to the sky. In most obulu, the outer edge of the verandah was beautifully enclosed by a low mud wall measuring about twelve inches, which kept out splashes from rain drops. The principal feature of the obulu is the ukpo, a platform of mud rising as high as thirty-six inches, and located at the far wall directly opposite the main entrance. Here, the head of the household spends the day, entertaining guests, issuing orders, or resting. Sacrifices to the ancestors and other shrines were likewise performed in front of the ukpo. The ordinary houses were

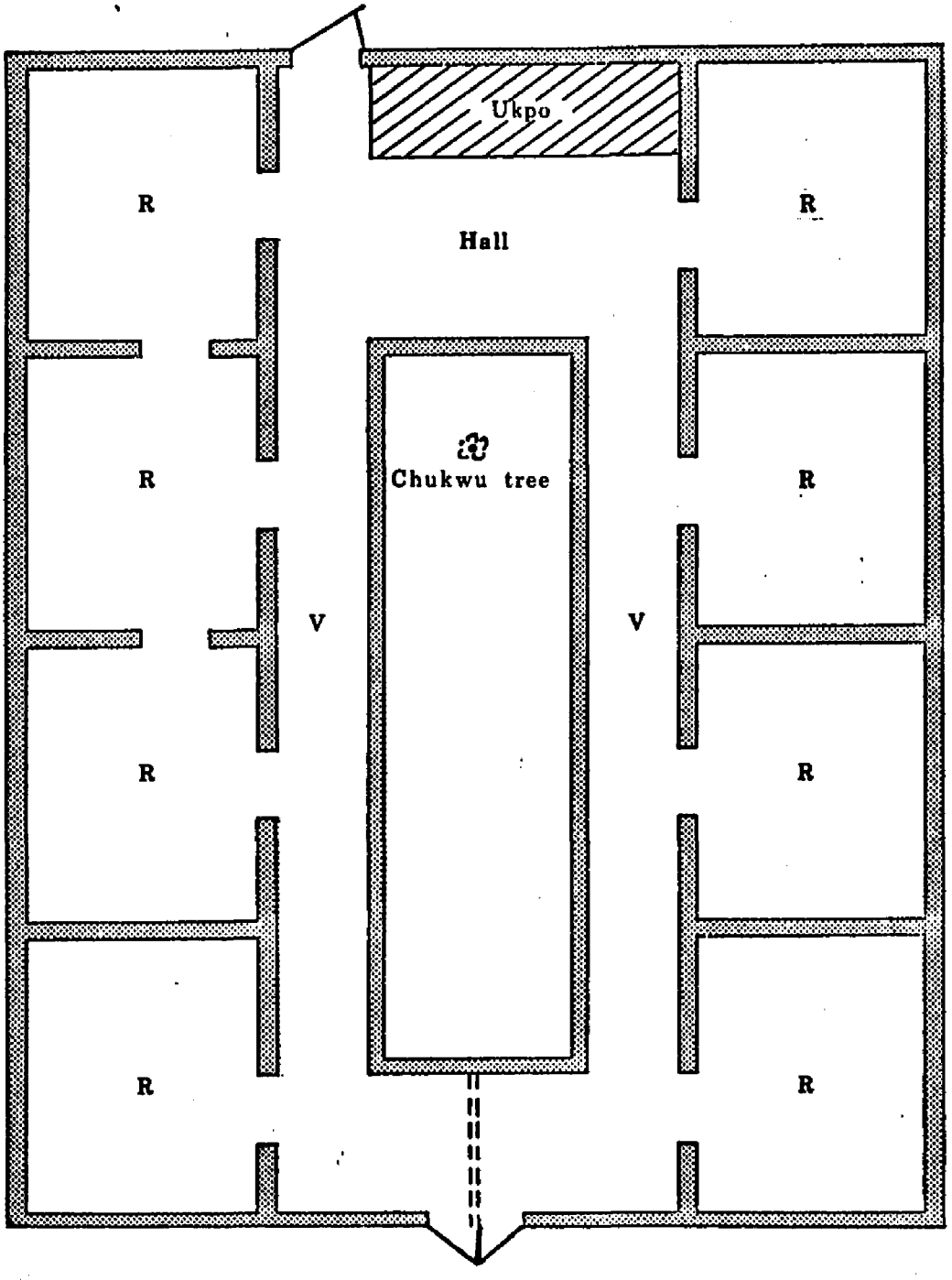
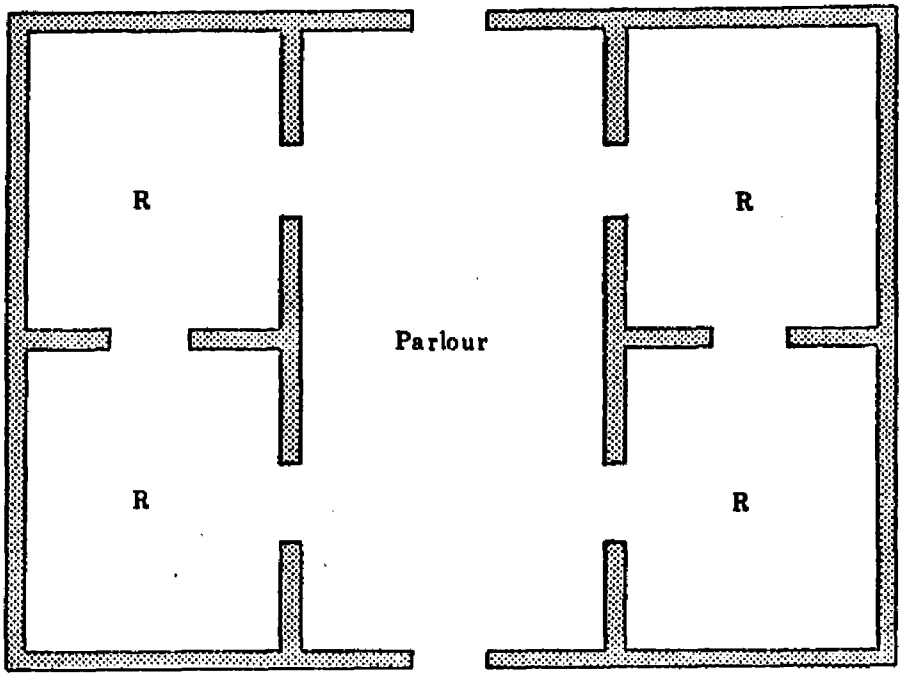


Fig. 7. Plan of an Obulu



R = Room

Uno–Nze= Shrine hut where the family gathers for sacqrifice to ancestors and other gods

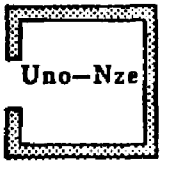


Fig. 8. Plan of a normal house with an adjoining shrine house

constructed in the form of a square in which an equal number of rooms, usually between four and six, opened into a narrow sitting room. The ukpo, might be located between the doors of the side rooms, or more often, at the far end facing the main door.

The royal palace in nineteenth century Aboh was far more complex than the obulu, and would appear, from the description of it contained in the journals of the Landers, to be a combination of three ordinary obulu. The palace consisted of three courts, the outer, the middle and the inmost court, linked one to the other. The first two courtyards were each twenty yards square. All three were in the form of an oblong square with wooden doors leading from one into the other. According to the Landers, the middle court, with porticos running through the sides, was far superior to the outer courtyard. The inmost court where the king lived and received people in audience was like the middle one, except that it had a low clay platform of about three feet from the ground opposite the main doorway. This was covered with reed and grass mats on top of which a red cloth was spread, and served the purpose of a throne. The king's favorite wives lived in this section, but the middle and outer yards accommodated his married sons, dependents and slaves, and others were used for storage of trade commodities.[10] Adjoining the palace was a tall enclosure of sturdy wood

where slaves meant for export were bound in chains and locked up prior to export.[11]

Just as the floods are contained by building devices, they were not allowed to disrupt social interaction, and at such times, every contrivance was invoked in order to sustain essential social and economic relations. For example, the local market was flooded, and buying and selling during this season was conducted at home. It required therefore that people know where to go for specific commodities. During the floods, observed the Reverend Schon, they

> "make a kind of scaffold attached to the outside of their huts on which they sit to enjoy themselves in the evening or expose to sale their fruits to the buyers who made thither; or if the water be too deep, they come in their canoes."[12]

II

Although the Aboh inhabit the fertile forest belt, and practise fishing and agriculture, it is as traders that they became famous in the nineteenth century. There were two kinds of trade, the local, and the long distance trade. Almost every one partook in the former, but only a few were in a position to engage in the latter which increased in scale and complexity with increasing coastal demands. Even where it was possible to isolate the magnates whose wealth financed the long distance trade system, the Aboh economy must not be conceived of as one

characterized by a rigid 'division of labor'. With a few exceptions, notably in the handicraft industry, every Aboh household was a replica of the total economy. Each contained, within it, all the occupations in different combinations and varying degrees of concentration. Depending on the season--flood or dry--members of a household engaged now in one occupation and then in the other.

Agriculture in present day Aboh is firmly based upon the cultivation of root crops; yams, genus Diascorea and cassava (manioc) for both consumption and export. Like the settlement pattern and house designs, agriculture has been strongly influenced by the floods. The farming cycle begins in December or sometimes in January, when the river hits its lowest level. Farming activities begin with iwa ani, i.e. "to cut out land", when a man, his wife or wives and unmarried children engage in the search for suitable land. The 'search' is not a prolonged one, for every patrilineage ordinarily possesses enough land to go round, but occasionally people go outside--to friends and matrilineal kin--to seek farm land. The males clear the land of trees and tall grass, and sometimes burn the rubbish before planting. The men cultivate yams which they regard as 'male crop', while the women grow "women crops"--cassava, okra, maize, pepper, sweet potato or nduku, groundnuts, melon and beans. The farms operated by women are generally located in the vicinity of the town, but the main 'family' farms are located about an hour or two's walk

away.

Harvesting commences as early as April when the women reap their sweet potato fields, followed in August and September (before the country is inundated) by the yam harvest. Cassava, which takes a longer time to mature, is harvested last in October. The agricultural implements in use today were those used in the nineteenth century, and perhaps much earlier. European visitors to Aboh in the last century mentioned the use of hoes, omumo, matchets, mpama, and diggers, nguani. The last named was either wooden or shod with iron.[13] Some people kept cattle--the short horned tse-tse resistant specie --, but goats, sheep and fowls were abundant.[14]

A thriving palm-oil industry seems to have characterised the city's economy, but no one is interested in oil making today. Indeed, it is doubtful if the indigenes ever participated in oil manufacturing for oral traditions ascribe the industry to immigrants, especially the Isoko.[15] There was some distinction between palm-oil for consumption and the 'trader's oil' meant for export. The former was prepared with very great care. According to William Cole who was stationed in Aboh for about two years in the middle of the nineteenth century, the palm-nuts were gathered and

> pounded in a mortar and when sufficiently bruised, are thrown into a pot containing water; this is allowed to boil, and the oil rising to the surface is skimmed off gently and allowed to cool.[16]

Palm-oil, manufactured in this manner, some fish, and yam

were the major items in the diet of the Aboh, and Cole noted in humor that "a nicer relish is seldom required to render the bachelor's yam palatable."[17] Export palm-oil was manufactured with less care. Instead of pounding, the nuts were gathered in a pit and covered with plaintian or banana leaves. They were left there to decay, after which the manufacturer climbed into the pit and began to squeeze out the oil with his feet. Nor was the oil boiled. Water was poured into the pit, the shaft separated, and the floating oil collected in large pots.[18]

The greater proportion of 'trader's oil' was however produced by the Isoko and Ukuani. Initially, the Isoko produced palm-oil for consumption and for local exchange. The European demand for palm-oil in the early decades of the nineteenth century revolutionalized production organization and methods. The Isoko were no longer content to produce oil in their country. Like the migrant cocoa farmers of the old Gold Coast, the Isoko organized themselves into small corporations of migrants--ukane--and rented rich palm lands from the Aboh, among others. The lease guaranteed to the landowners an annual rent, and a stated portion of the produce.[19] But this structured arrangement met only part of the foreign demand. As we shall later find, the lucrative oil trade impelled the Aboh to travel wide for supplies.

Unlike farming, fishing was mostly undertaken by the men. The ikum, which has since passed out of use, was

said by visitors to be one of the most popular gear in the last century. It was deployed mainly along the Niger. The following description of this technique was given by A. Mockler-Ferryman:

> A platform is erected on poles on the river bank, forty or fifty feet in height. On this structure sits the fisherman, holding in his hand one end of a long rope, the other end being attached to a circular framework covered with a bag-like net. The circular net works on a pivot or hinge close under the bank, and when let to, lies at the bottom of the river, well baited with fish intestines and other dainties. The fisherman, from his platform can see the fish over the net, and when he thinks the right moment has arrived, he pulls the rope gently, till the framework is out of the water. The rope is then secured and the man descends to take his capture from the net.[20]

Attempts to ascertain when and from whence this idea reached Aboh met with little success. Those who claimed to know merely said that it was practised by ndegbo i.e. "people of old", but its use over a long stretch of the river would indicate diffusion from one center. The casting net or ojogolo is the most popular fishing gear in use today. In the last century, the Aboh were said to be manufacturers of 'substantial' net, but how long before this the throw-net was in use cannot now be ascertained. It may however have been introduced into the Niger by the Ijo of the Delta.

Commercial fishing today is seasonal, and is largely dependent on the public and private lakes.[21] A day or so before the lake is declared open--ikpu mmili--prospective fishers commence the difficult task of getting their canoes into the lakes. This process is referred to as Ikpuya ugbo.

Some of the lakes are located a considerable distance from the Niger, with no connecting creeks. In such circumstances, the canoes are taken into the lakes by carrying them part of the way, and dragging them on improvised 'slippers' the rest of the way. Temporary shelters--obibi--are erected and in these groups of men, usually the household males, spend all of the fishing days.[22] How long a lake is fished depends on initial catch, but it varied between one and two weeks.

In the past, the catch from these lakes were not marketed on a large scale. Choice fish were gathered by the heads of households as 'tribute' to the head of the compound and the monarch.[23] However, as trade with neighboring peoples took on added importance, some changes took place in lake fishing. Women now appeared on the scene. They purchased large quantities of fish which were smoked on special bamboo platforms around the lakes, and carried off for sale. Traditions however indicate that the old concept and practice was in vogue until the end of the last century, and is still practised to a limited extent.

A number of crafts were reported in nineteenth century Aboh.[24] Most were domestic, but a few craftsmen earned their livelihood by exchanging their manufactures for foodstuffs. Cloth-weaving seem to have been dominated by the women. In 1830, the Landers observed in the king's palace, "a number of women...employed in manufacturing a kind of cloth of cotton and dried grass which they wove

together".[25] But other crafts were more specialized. These included canoe building, ivory working, blacksmithing, wood carving and sculpture, brass working and beadworking. Canoes of various sizes and shapes, from the pint-sized, one-man, ugbo ojo (speed boat) to the massive trading and war canoes were the only means of communication for the Niger Valley and the Delta people, and were consequently fundamental to the trade of the region. Canoe making thus became a very important industry in Aboh. According to the Lander brothers, the Aboh people were "famous for making large canoes, and all those of the different rivers, from Benin to Calabar are constructed by them."[26]

Other craftsmen specialized in the production of wooden implements - bowls, mortars and pestles, diggers, religious objects, e.g. the Igbo god of fortune, ikenga[27](plate III). Others were sculptors, whose skills seemed to have been devoted to beautifying the homes of the principal men. The royal palace was an object of admiration in the early decades of the last century. The pillars which supported the verandah of the inmost courtyard as well as the wooden doors were, according to the Landers and Oldfield, decorated with a series of carved figures.[28] Court art was also characteristic of the Bini and Yoruba and the main object here was to distinguish the temples, palaces and the houses of the chiefs from those of the common people.[29]

Among the highest paid craftmen were the ivory and brass workers whose products were bought mainly by the

wealthy class. Until the fourth decade of the present century, ivory anklets and wristlets (odu) were the most valued ornaments in Aboh. A man of substance exhibited his wealth by providing his favorite wives or daughters with wristlets and anklets made out of elephant tusk.[30] The "superior class of females", wrote Oldfield in 1832, "wear immense anklets of ivory seven or eight inches wide and an inch thick" adding that they were unable to walk with the immense weight around them.[31] These ornaments were particularly expensive. When Baikie attempted to buy a pair as souvenirs, he was told they would cost him the value of four slaves.[32] The presence in nineteenth century Aboh of brassmiths who produced various ornaments is attested by the evidence of Baikie who purchased some "brass ornaments" among other objects "as specimens of the manufacture of the place".[33] Allen and Thomson reported the profuse use of brass armlets and anklets,[34] while in the 1880's, the Belgian Adolphe Burdo described the Aboh people as "very industrious", and manufacturers of "various types of metal ornaments".[35] The brassworkers were particularly noted for the production of the brass ofo, especially sought by the aristocracy who preferred the ornamental brass ancestral object to the ordinary wooden one.[36] Blacksmiths were mainly engaged in the production of agricultural implements--matchets, hoes and spears, but again those employed in this profession were mostly 'aliens' perhaps Igbo from across the Niger and some Hausa.[37]

III

Some writers have not inappropriately described the Aboh as a clan.[38] This is attributable to the prevalence of the tradition that 'all' Aboh descended from Ogwezi. The city is divided into four sectors or ebo, which are themselves social as well as territorial units. The sectors--Umu Ogwezi, Umuojugbali, Umuossai, and Umuozegbe[39] are agnatically defined maximal lineages named after their respective ancestral founders. The Aboh suffix umu is in this context an appropriate description of how every Aboh perceives his or her relationship with other members of the kin-oriented sector. The suffix umu orders the city, into discrete categories of descent groups at the upper levels of agnatic affiliation. It helps for example to distinguish between "us children of Ojugbali", and "they, children of Ossai". It is the furthest extension of kinship and when two Aboh meet for the first time, the first question is, "where do you come from?" to which the ready respond could be "I am of umuojugbali, or umuozegbe etc. It is only after this that more detailed information as to one's compound or parents may be demanded.

The Aboh give the impression, perhaps subconsciously, that the four sectors named above are so spatially dispersed and socio-politically distinct, as to constitute four independent village units. As an example, if a visitor

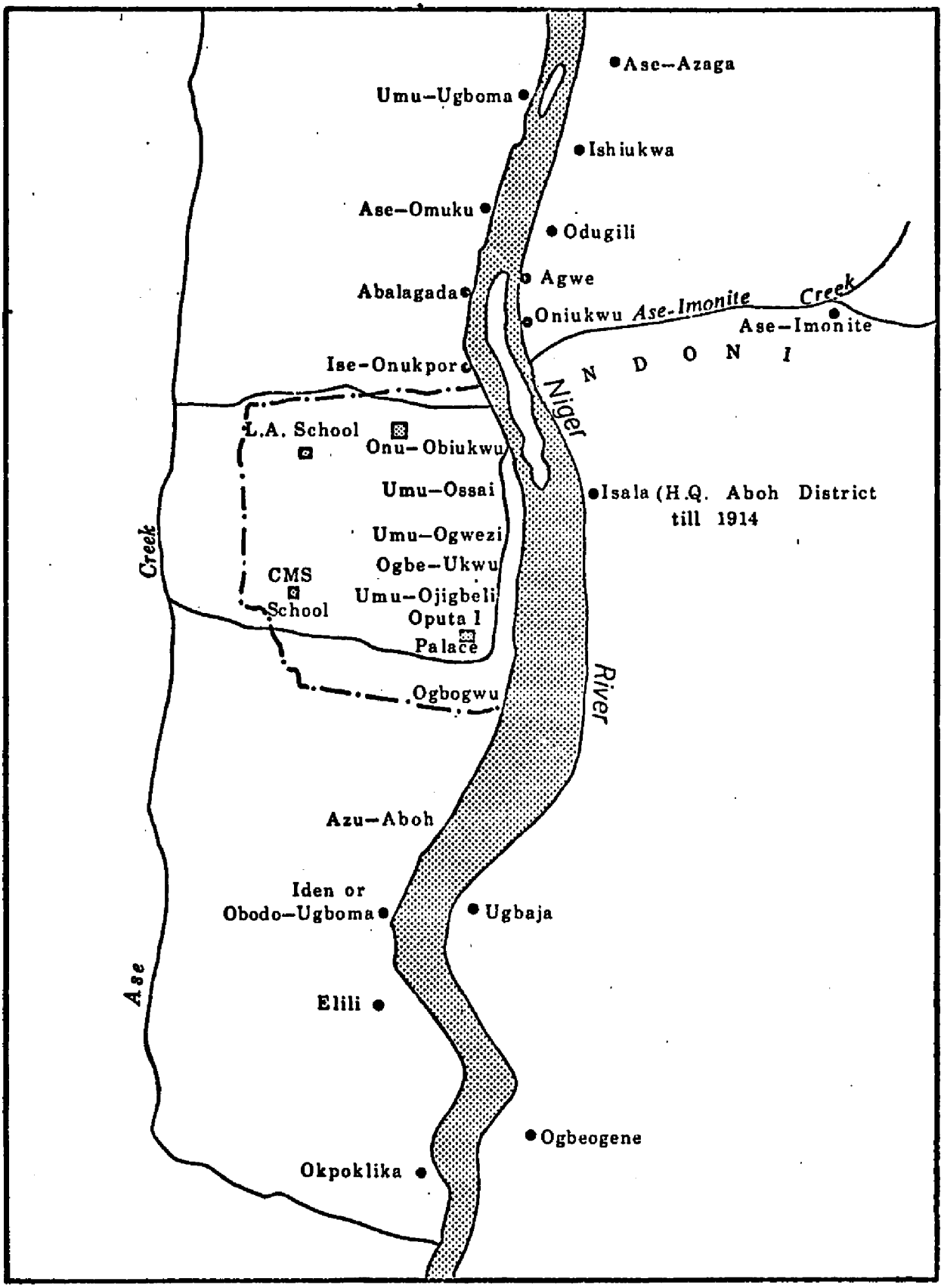


Fig. 9. Aboh Town and Environs

were to ask someone going to visit a friend or relative in say Umuogwezi, where he was going, he would,in all probability, not say "I am going to visit Mr. X or Y". He would prefer to say "I am going to Umuogwezi", even though the latter sector is only three minutes walk from his own. This usage has a long tradition. In the past, the territorial limits of the sectors determined the area within which members may move with freedom. Those who wandered beyond sector borders unarmed ran the risk of being subjected to very serious beating, or in extreme cases, captivity. This happened most when the sectors were at 'war' and the indication is that it was not an uncommon situation especially during contests for the throne. The principal men guaranteed some safety of movement for their children and messengers by providing them with some identification, for example their staff or ceremonial fans (ezuzu).[40] In point of fact the Aboh say that the city of Aboh is comprised of obodo ano i.e. "four towns", a concept which is given greater validity by the fact that there are no "national" or city wide festivals. Each sector celebrates its own festivals and sacrifices to its own deities,[41] the only exception being the annual sacrifice to the ofo nze by the Obi during the yam harvest, and the sacrifice to the goddess of the River Niger.

Not all Aboh live in the city. There are several

off-shoot villages, some far more populous than their mother-sectors. But they possess no social or political identity outside of that of the mother-sectors. Essentially farming and fishing settlements, the Aboh who live in them do not consider themselves citizens of these places. Rather they identify themselves as people from Umuossai, Umuogwezi etc. Although there are no restrictions as to who may settle in particular villages, they tend to have the bulk of the population, in most cases, all of the population, from the mother-sector in Aboh town. In other words, an Umuossai village would most likely have all its settlers from that sector. Again, the villages have no festivals of their own, and settlers come to Aboh for meetings, festivals, major sacrifices, etc.[42]

Each sector is comprised of a number of patrilineages which the Aboh call ummunadi i.e. "children of one father". The patrilineage corresponds to the ogbe or ward and has a genealogical span of as many as six named generations.[43] While the sector can be viewed as a protecting umbrella for all its members who inherit its name at birth, the ogbe is the basic social unit, all members of which reside in one compound. In the following analysis therefore, patrilineage, ogbe, ward, and compound will be used interchangeably to mean one and the same thing.

An Aboh compound is ordinarily U-shaped, and sitting at its base is the house of its headman which is referred to as obulu irrespective of its architectural form. The

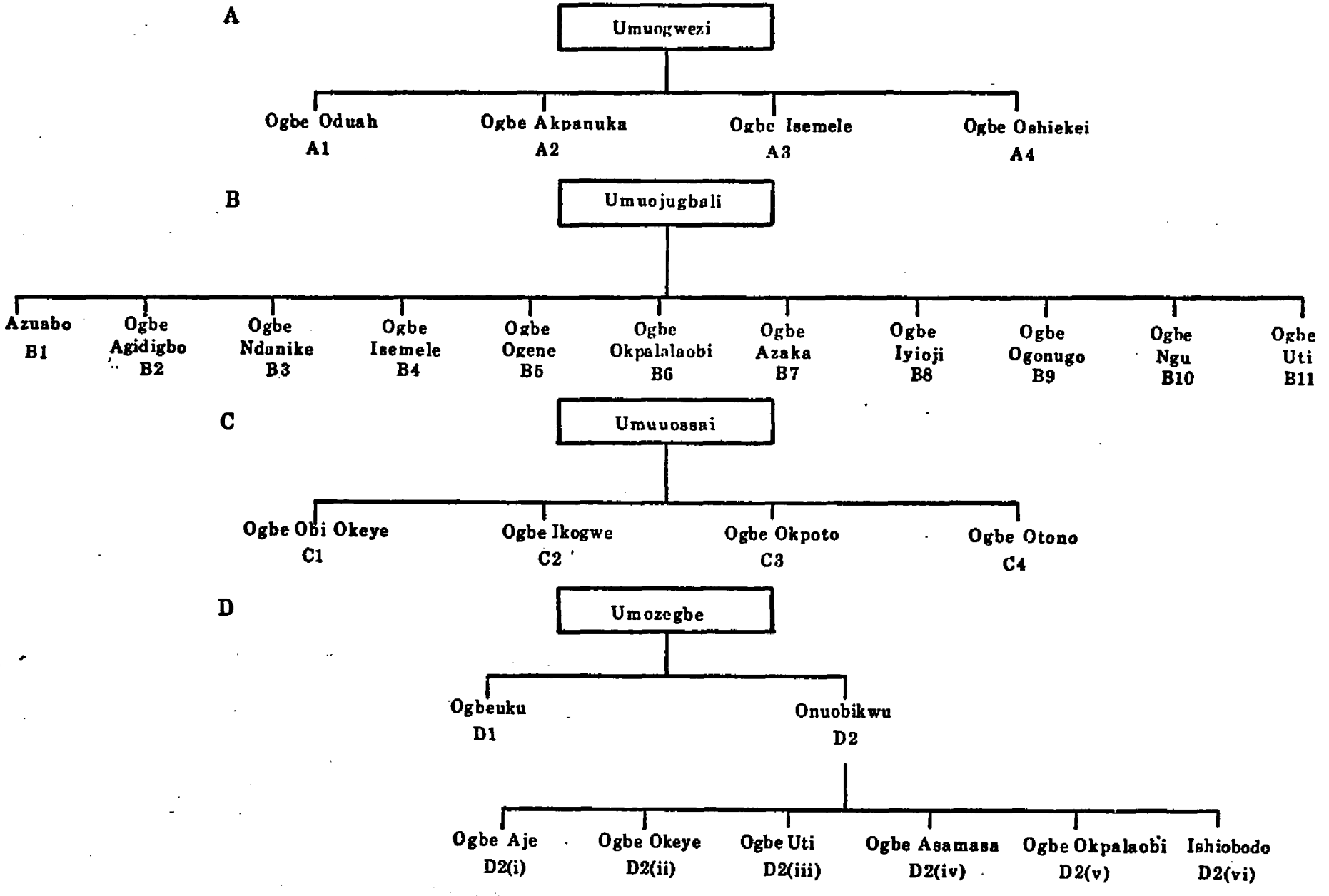


Table 2. Sectors and Patrilineages or Compounds (Ogbe) of Aboh

use of the word in this sense connotes 'great house' or 'ancestral home' for all the members of the patrilineage. The obulu faces the central courtyard, and on either side are lined at intervals, smaller houses. It is this central courtyard that was dug in the past to connect the creek so as to allow canoes berth at the doors of the various houses. The obulu residence of the head of the patrilineage of compound serves all its members as a 'court' where disputes are settled as well as a political and religious center. There are twenty one patrilineages in Aboh, distributed rather unevenly among the four sectors, and as in the latter, each patrilineage, ward or compound is known by the name of its founder to which the prefix ogbe is added.

The patrilineage is further sub-divided into sub-lineages which the Aboh call imusu (lit. in a mourning group). These vary in number from three to six, depending on the size of the compound, how long ago it was established, and the degree to which segmentation has occured. Below this is the simplest level of Aboh social structure-- the elementary family --comprised of a man, his wife or wives and their children. The more common set up is the "extended family" composed of a man and his wives, their children, including married sons, his brothers, their wives and children. Each family occupies a homestead--unc--in the compound.

Of the levels of kinship thus far described--the sector

(ebo); the patrilineage (ummunadi or ogbe); the sublineage, imusu, and the elementary family (nde ofu imuno, i.e. people of one house), the patrilineage variously defined as compound or ogbe is for the Aboh the major corporate and functional unit. All of its members irrespective of age, sex and status refer to one another as nwannadi i.e. "child of a father". Ownership of the land on which the compound stands is vested in it as are farm lands and fishing lakes outside the city. Its members recognize a common descent and unite regularly for sacrifices to the ofo umunnadi--the ofo of the founding ancestor, which all of them regard as the supreme judge and the symbol of authority of whoever is the head of the compound. This patrilineage leader, usually the oldest male in the compound (okpala) is vested with full political authority to speak for and represent the patrilineage and usually resides in the obulu. The okpala administers the estate of the patrilineage, assigning farm lands to members, sites for those who wish to build houses and ensuring that no 'outsider' trespasses.

However, the homestead or uno is the basic economic and domestic unit. Its members co-operate in agriculture, fishing and trade. The individual's basic needs-food, shelter and clothing--are met within this group, and it is only when help fails here that the higher levels of affiliation are called in. It should however be stressed that it is essentially an economic unit with negligible social and political significance of its own outside the patrilineage or ummunadi. It is perhaps no coincidence

that the Aboh have no term for this unit, preferring to explain relationship at this level descriptively, viz: "people who live in one house". The word uno, merely describes the physical structure "house".

The primacy of the patrilineage or ogbe both as a residential and a highly localized kinship group in twentieth century Aboh is exemplified by the analysis of the patterns of settlement in the sub-sector of Onuobikwu. It should be emphasized that Onuobikwu is in theory a patrilineage whose founder lived in the first half of the nineteenth century. But in practice, Onuobikwu enjoys the status of a sector both structurally and by usage. Like the other sectors it is composed of several compounds or ogbe. It has its own deities, and celebrates its own 'national' festivals. But for all other purposes it is grouped with Ogbuku in the Umuozegbe sector. The reason for this will shortly be apparent.

According to Onuobikwu traditions,[44] Ossai, one of the sons of Obi Ugboma, was elected to succeed his father as king of Aboh. He accordingly moved from Ogbuku where he had his house into the official residence of Aboh kings which at the time was located at the northern end of the city. It was at the time isolated for the Lander brothers described the position of the palace as "near the outskirts of the town", and approached "by paths little frequented".[45] Beside his household, Obi Ossai was accompanied by a number of his matrilineal kin whom he had

invited from Emu in Ukwuani in the heat of the election. These established a small settlement now identified as ishiobodo (lit. the end of the town) close by the palace.

In 1830 when the Landers were in Aboh, the king's children were still very young, and no doubt lived in rooms within the palace. His eldest son Chukuwumah Okpalaobi whose age was estimated at 50 years in 1860[46] was probably not born until 1810 or shortly after. By the time Obi Ossai died in 1844 significant changes had taken place. The eldest and more industrious of his sons, amongst whom were Chukwumah, Okeye, Aje and Uti had each hived off the palace household to establish their own houses. These would later grow into the patrilineages or compounds that make up Onuobikwu. The process by which new patrilineages are brought into existence on geographically discrete sites is known in Aboh as ikawa ogbe i.e. "to begin a ward".

According to Aboh traditions Obi Ossai had many children.[47] In point of fact, Dr. MacWilliam of the Trotter Expedition reported that the monarch had so many children that he no longer kept count.[48] As will become clear in due course, the process of building a new compound--ikwa ogbe--was far more complex than the simple act of lineage fission. It pre-supposed economic success, notably in the field of long distance trade, and the acquisition of 'slaves' and 'dependents'. Therefore the majority of the king's children, particularly the younger ones, joined the households of their

more successful sibblings or half-sibblings, and became absorbed into it.[49]

It is apparent from fig.[10] that with the exception of Ogbe Ajie (C) where some dispersal of homesteads has occurred, the other compounds or patrilineages are territorially discrete. For reason of space, the analysis will be restricted to Ogbe Aje, but the underlying principle is the same for all patrilineages and compounds of Aboh. Residence and kinship are co-terminus. The characteristic feature of Ogbe Aje as exemplified in the accompanying geneological chart is the common descent from Aje of every member of the compound.[50] It is further to be observed that taken as a unit, the members of Ogbe Aje stand in the same relationship to members of the other compounds descended from Obi Ossai.

Up to this point, attention has been focused on the agnatic descent group. But relationship with one's mothers patrilineage--ikwunne--is no less important, and can in practice be as strong as ties with one's agnatic group. The patrilineage or compound in which ego's mother has membership is a 'complementary' kin group and stands in an affinal relationship to ego's patrilineage or compound. The classificatory term ogo which translates simply as 'in law' is a reciprocal terminology and is used by both groups without discrimination as to age, sex or status.

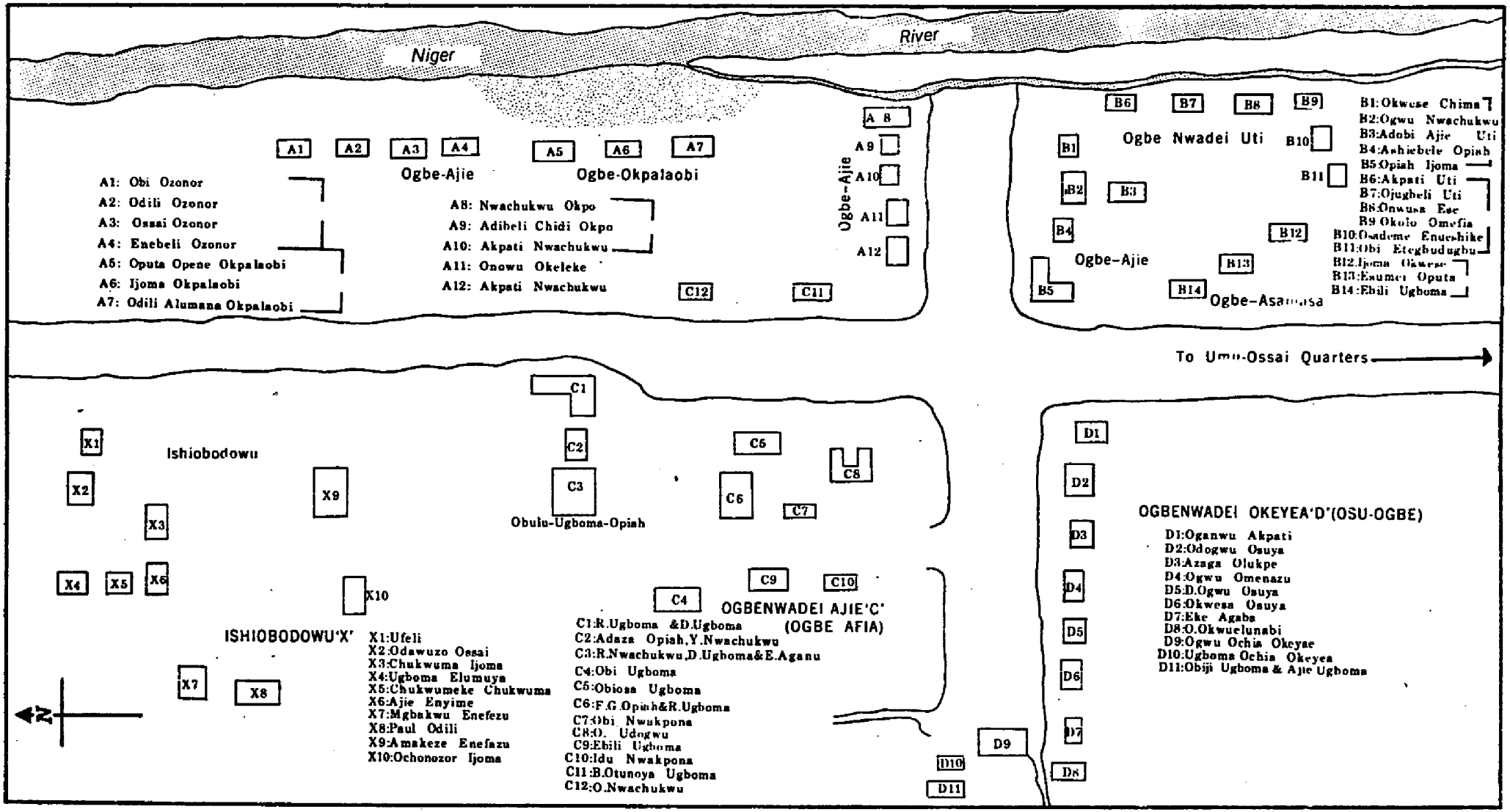


FIG.10 ONU-OBIUKWU QUARTERS,ABOH

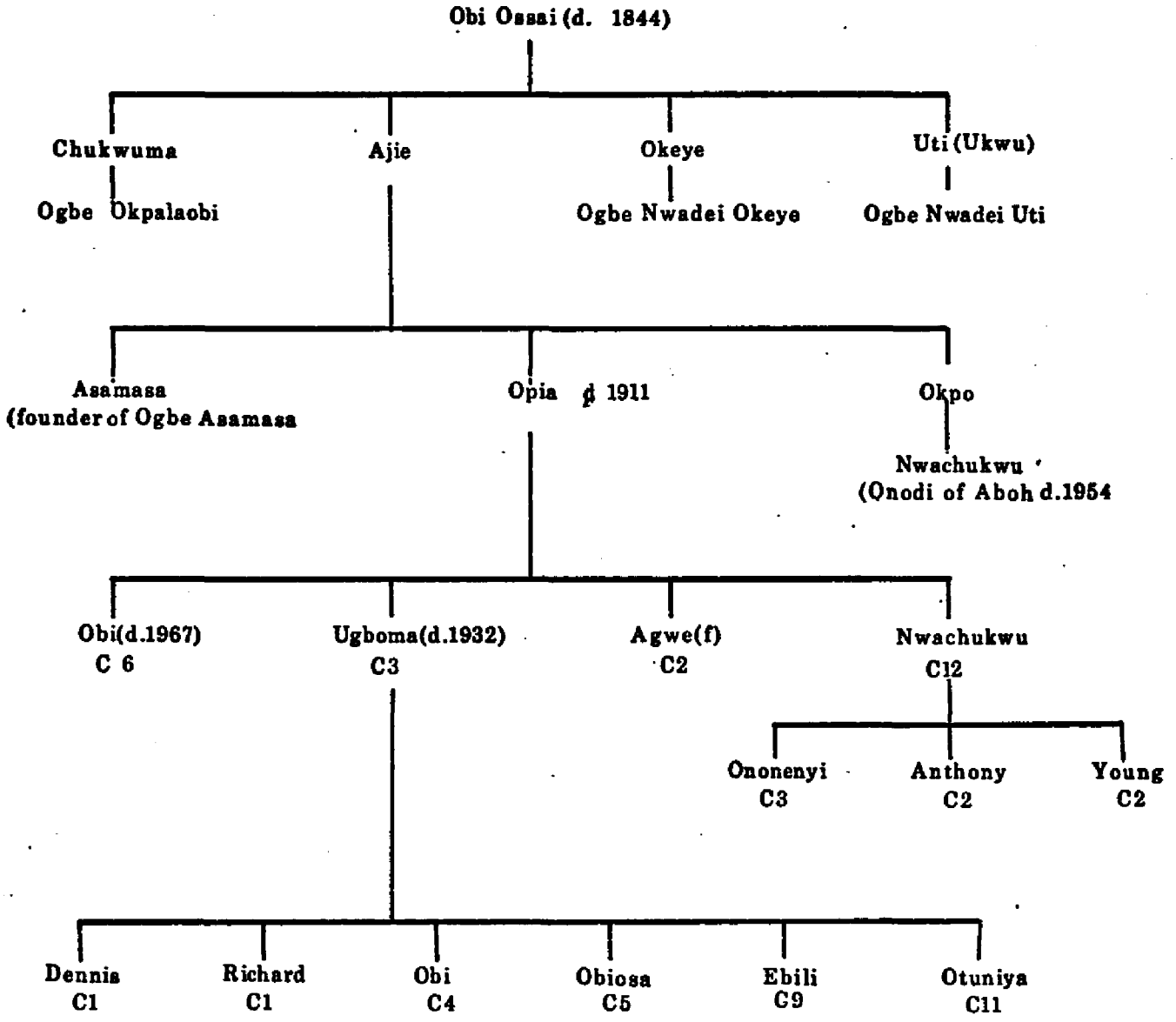


Table 3. Genealogy of Residents of Ogbe Aje in Onuobikwu Sector, Aboh 97

One was always welcome in his mother's compound, and some people actually elect to reside there, particularly if they were involved in a serious quarrel in their patrilineage or thought they had been unfairly treated. But whether he established home there or not, a man was entitled to the love, support and protection of his mother's compound. The character of this tie, and the obligations that go with it, are not affected by separation, divorce or the death of ego's mother. Ordinarily no one may inherit property in his mother's patrilineage, but a 'son' could obtain land for farming as easily as other members of the 'patrilineage'. He was allowed to fish, without payment, in ponds and lakes belonging to his mother's patrilineage. People not in any way related to this compound paid in fish or cash. A 'son' who develops close ties with his mother's group and resides among them is thought to be 'loyal', and the group say "he has come to stay with us". The Aboh readily admit that love and deep attachment is felt more for the mother's group than for one's patrilineage, hence the adage: iku ka na uka nne. The Aboh proverb: ife ka madu meni niku nne waji ni wafu n'ani (lit: one must have shown great commitment and interest in the welfare of his mother's patrilineage to be deserving of land there) typifies the legitimate claims of one's mothers patrilineage over one's loyalties.

IV

In the course of discussing the characteristics of Aboh oral traditions, mention was made of the existence of two social classes--umudei (princes) and ndichie (immigrants). The consensus of Aboh traditions is that the ndichie constitute a later accretion to the group who came from Benin.[51] The traditions say that one of Aboh's attraction in the past is its relative safety. It was protected from attack by such natural barriers as the Niger on the east and the marshes of the ofobo on the west.[52] Consequently, refugee criminals from neighboring countries found Aboh a place they could start life anew. Many others, according to the traditions, immigrated into Aboh of their own volition, perhaps under the impetus of the growing importance of Aboh as a port of trade. The greater majority were slaves captured in wars or purchased in the slave markets. The descendants of the founders of Aboh refer to such immigrants and their descendants as ndichie.

It is very important to note that among all Igbo-speaking peoples, the social status of 'immigrants' as ndichie is unique only to Aboh. In other areas, the term ndichie is reserved for the titled men of the ozo society especially, and elders generally.[53] The earliest mention of this class among the Igbo was in 1790 when Captain Adams reported that European slavers were hesitant about purchasing

a category of Igbo slaves he described as 'Breeche'. The Breeche, now agreed by most authorities to be ndichie, were rejected at Bonny

> because the impressions made on their minds by their degraded situation was rendered more galling and permanent from the exalted rank which they occupied in their own country...Breeche in the Heebo [Igbo] language signifies gentleman or the eldest son of one, who is not allowed to perform in his own country any menial office.[54]

Again, among the Onitsha, the titled chiefs with whom the obi rules the town are collectively styled ndichie.[55] However, the class from amongst whom the kings are selected in both Onitsha and Aboh, is known as umudei. In both kingdoms, the ruling elite i.e. umudei consists of an intrusive group, who supposedly brought with them, from Benin, the institution of kingship. In both kingdoms, the ndichie are a group apart from the ruling elite, unlike the rest of Igbo country where they constitute the political elite. It seems safe to conclude that in Aboh ndichie was used to describe the authochtonous socio-political elite, perhaps the bulk of the Akarai who no doubt remained behind after the Aboh conquest. This is not to deny that there were immigrants, but the traditions that 'all' ndichie were 'new comers' is certainly expressive of current beliefs and values--that the immigrant Benin princes (umudei) own the country and all others are 'late comers'.

This hypothesis is borne out by sub-divisions within the ndichie class, as well as the rights and obligations

which go with the various sub-divisions. The ndichie social class is comprised of ndichie ukwu (senior ndichie) and ndichie nta (lesser ndichie). The former, according to traditions were 'free' immigrants who were by law obliged to attach themselves to the compounds of members of the umudei class as 'dependents'.[56] The Aboh term for this process--onye onwa ku se i.e. "one who comes from another place to live under my protection" is self explanatory. Such an immigrant was initially provided with a room in the master's obulu, or assigned to one of the many houses in the compound. In time, he was provided with a plot to put up his own house. Although he was theoretically 'free', he was reckoned to be a member of his master's patrilineage, and he owed certain services. These included working in the 'lord's' farm, service in the trading and war canoes,as well as regular tributes of fish and yams. It must however be stressed that services and gifts to superiors--ife nsu-- is not restricted to the immigrant, and one's own children were equally expected to render services and make gifts. In return the master protected his dependent, and also provides him with farm land, and other material help. In principle any Aboh, irrespective of one's social class, was entitled to possess himself of dependents. In practice, immigrants found it more advantageous to affiliate with the privileged umudei.

The ndichie nta were the more significant, from the

point of view of Aboh social and economic history. This was the class of slaves and their descendants, who like the ndichie ukwu became fully incorporated members of their owner's patrilineage. But some minor terminological distinction should be made. A first generation slave was idibo, an Igbo word which loosely translates as 'servant'. The Igbo word for slave--osu--is considered impolite by the Aboh and seldom used. Second and subsequent generation slaves belonging to the umudei were referred to as ndichie dei, while descendants of idibo belonging to the ndichie ukwu were classified as ndichie nta. It should however be stressed that the distinction is of minor importance, and the Aboh generally use the term ndichie nta to denote people of slave origin.

The idibo were usually acquired through a variety of means. Some were victims of the not infrequent wars in which the Aboh engaged with their neighbors. That wars were an avenue for recruiting slaves is borne out by the testimony of Obi Ossai who in 1841 told Captain Trotter that "when other chiefs quarrel with me and make war, I take all I can as slaves."[57] Others were the harpless victims of kidnapping, but most domestic slaves were selected from among those purchased for transshipment to the coast. Rich supplies were to be had from the nearby markets of Okpai on the Niger and Iselegu on the Ase River, but the majority were victims of the slave wars of the

region north of the Niger Benue confluence, and acquired by means of a well established long distance trade.

Slaves and their descendants i.e. idibo and ndichie nta comprised a substantial proportion of the total population of the city of Aboh. Simon Jones, a liberated slave of Igbo origin who accompanied the 1841 Trotter Expedition, reported that "the number of slaves is greater than the number of free people".[58] Thus of an estimated population of between 6,000 and 8,000 persons, [59] at least a third must have been of the ndichie nta class. Simon Jones, it might be explained, resided in Aboh for three weeks (between September 20 and October 11), and was specifically enjoined by the Reverend Schon to pursue inquiries on the state of slavery in Aboh. His evidence thus deserves to be taken with some caution.

The slave population of Aboh came from countries far and wide, and was a mixture of several ethnic groups. Obi Ossai's domestic slaves were said to belong to "various nations"--Igbo, Nupe, Kakanda and Hausa.[60] The Reverend Schon even reported the presence of slaves of the 'Yaruba nation',[61], but these could have been Yoruba from Ilorin.

The character of the institution of domestic slavery in the interior attracted some attention in the nineteenth century. The poll of evidence indicates however that it was in many respects not dissimilar to the form of servitude which prevailed in the Niger Delta, and about which

much has been written.[62] They received humane treatment from the hands of their masters, and were in general respected by their fellow citizens. Slaves were themselves owners of sizeable property,and were granted farm land and allowed some days off in the week to work on their own farms.[63] Mockler Ferryman who accompanied Major Claude Macdonald into the Lower Niger in the last decade of the last century noted that the servitude of domestics in the Niger Valley was exceptionally light. No domestic slave, he goes on, could be killed or sold without the approval of the others, and the mutual confidence was such that a master did nothing without first consulting with his slaves.[64]

Eye-witness accounts of domestic servitude, and the plight of the ndichie nta in Aboh would seem to confirm the above sentiment. William Cole as much as stated that slavery in Aboh was in many cases "a blessing and not a bane". He went on: "I'll be bound to say that a slave here is not so oppressively treated and taxed as our own [English] unpitied artisans",[65] Simon Jonas informed the Reverend Schon that at Aboh,

> the treatment they receive at the hands of their masters is kind and humane. They are allowed after some years service to build houses for themselves.[66]

Traditions collected at Aboh[67] say that a bought "slave" was taken into the master's household and provided

with housing, farmland etc., if he was old enough to earn his livelihood. Children were, however, assigned to the care of the master's principal wives, or in certain cases older slaves, who cared for them until they could stand on their own feet. Children of between nine and eleven years were more popular because they were less prone to escaping, and much more easily brought up to feel at home in their new environment. Some of the slaves, especially those assigned under the care of other slaves, seemed to have suffered terrible inconveniences. According to the Reverends Crowther and Taylor,

> when a new slave is brought, he is given to an older slave to be taken care of, and fed as his boy. With the exception of some very little boys, very few of them get any meals at their master's expense. They scarcely have anything for them to do, until the canoes are ready again for the markets.[68]

An Aboh slave owner was obliged to protect his slave, provide him with farmland, and a piece of land on which to set up his personal house, and most of all to furnish him with a wife. The provision of a bride has a ritual and social significance, and consequently the Aboh view this as the most important duty towards a slave.[69] Anthropological literature has drawn attention to the characteristic feature of African marriages as being more of an alliance between two lineages than a union of two people as husband and wife. Lineage members co-operate in the provision of the bride wealth and participate in the rituals of marriage.[70]

A master forged this alliance by providing the bride-wealth for his slave's first wife, and it shows that the slave was a member of his patrilineage. The children of the marriage were therefore, by implication, the bonds of unity between two lineages in the community and signified the 'emancipated' status of the slave. In return for all this, the slave worked on his master's farm on specified days of the week, served as a canoe crew on trading missions, served as a warrior in the war canoes, and paid tribute in yams, fish, cattle, poultry etc.

Most of the services enumerated above ceased when the slave left his master's household and established his own, usually upon marriage. According to Simon Jonas, after the slaves have

> built their own houses, they are set free and cannot be called upon by Obi or their former masters to work for them.[71]

An annual tribute was instead substituted for the usual services. However this was not fixed and varied with the slave's property. A minimum of 40 yams was obligatory during the annual harvests, but those who kept livestock --cattle, goat, sheep and poultry--gave some as part of the annual tribute.[72]

The use of the word 'free' by Simon Jonas is imprecise. The consensus of Aboh oral traditions is that in times past, a slave was in principle never 'free'. As will become apparent in a later discussion, slaves and their descendants

were bound, to this day, by certain political inhibitions. They were not, for example, free to leave the compound of their masters to reside wherever they chose. Again, they acquired social identity through membership of their master's patrilineage and would be considered open to attack and kidnapping the moment they dropped their master's name or left his compound. They had full title to all the property they were able to amass, but they were still their master's 'men' and obliged by convention to attend upon them and pay occasional tribute, (ife nsu). In a general sense then, the master continued to regard the 'emancipated' slave and his household as an appendage of his own compound.

The fact that this category of slaves were accorded recognition as full citizens is attested by the fact that they were differentiated from bought slaves or captives on important ritual occasions. It was for example customary to sacrifice a large number of slaves at the death of an Obi or great men who were themselves slave holders. At the death of Obi Ossai, about forty slaves were reported to have been slain to accompany the king to the underworld. Such victims were however "specially purchased for this purpose, domestic slaves never being so treated."[72]

Comforting though the above consideration might be, many of the slaves faced unmitigated hardships. Starvation must have been a constant hazard particularly for the new ones who had not grown accustomed to the language,

environment, and culture of Aboh.

> "After their services in the canoes for a week", wrote Crowther and Taylor, "they are left to themselves to do little or no jobs for their own support, or to sell wood, which latter employment many do not relish."[74]

Yet a few industrious slaves made the headlines and were no doubt the envy of less successful 'free' men. According to the Reverend Schon, the surest sign of the increase in the wealth of the slaves in Aboh was the number of wives each man possessed and some of them, he says, "had as many as five or six wives."[75] Samuel Crowther added that

> some of the older slaves have themselves become owners of a large property and many slaves, and thus become in a great measure independent of their masters except waiting on them occasionally.[76]

One of the best documented example of the heights to which people of slave origin in Aboh could aspire is provided by the career of one Azaka who died in November 1859. According to William Cole, who was Azaka's personal friend, he (Azaka) had been sold into slavery in Aboh. When he began his epic career, Azaka had only "a thousand cowries in the world", but in a year or two, he had purchased a good canoe, and acquired "a couple of slaves". The now successful slave soon migrated into an uninhabited tract of land, and there established his own household. Cole went on:

> A short time afterwards, he was followed by a troop of runaway slaves who sought his protection and finally acknowledged him as king [i.e. chief]. At this time, Obie [Obi Ossai] was the king of Aboh,

> but being an improvident fellow, his extravagance compelled him to seek relief from Azaka. It was granted, and a subsequent period found him in possession of the major portion of Aboh....[77]

The issue of Obi Ossai's 'improvidence' is doubtful. Not only do traditions not corroborate it, Cole gives the impression, which is contrary to Aboh tradition, that land was alienable, and that Azaka 'bought' or 'acquired' rights over portions of Aboh from the monarch. There is a patrilineage which is known to this day as Ogbe Azaka, and while this could be the compound established by the fellow Cole described, not much is preserved in the traditions to allow for a more difinitive statement. If establishment of compounds be taken as a criterion, then a good proportion of Aboh ndichie nta class equalled Azaka, for a few of the twenty six ogbe were built by them.

But the majority seem to have done well enough to be content to stay in Aboh instead of escaping. In 1832 for example, Captain William Allen had offered to take Ali, a Hausa slave belonging to Obi Ossai I, to England, but Ali rejected the offer. Again in 1841, Ali, by now a reputable pilot, got as far as Fernando Po with Trotter's expedition where Allen renewed his request, but Ali turned it down. He preferred to return to his master, noting that he

> was married, and although he knew he was a slave, he had commenced a little trading on his own account, was quite satisfied with his lot and did not wish to leave his country.[78]

Ali's attitude according to Allen was the result of the Aboh practice of incorporating slaves into the society, thus inducing "many to sit down who would otherwise try to escape."[79]

The independence of the slave class drew the attention of European visitors to Aboh in the nineteenth century. The slaves, reported Claude Macdonald, treated their masters on "terms of equality". He went on:

> The only way in which they are to any degree hampered in their movements is that they owe a kind of feudal obligation to the house of their proprietors, so that they cannot leave the country or town without his permission, but this is a restriction more theoretical than practical, and which is very seldom regarded by the slaves when they wish to disregard it.[80]

Yet, there were profound inequalities. Slaves or their descendants (ndichie nta) could not by any act of manumission transform their status to that of the nwadei or princes. They were theoretically free to seek political and religious offices, but this cannot be interpreted as 'equality' for they may only be appointed to offices open to the ndichie class. No ndichie nta was eligible for titles reserved for the umudei the most important being the obiship and the Oduah. There was a certain degree of intermarriage, many informants actually reporting that marriage between a master and his female slave was not uncommon,[81] But it was hedged by taboos and purification rituals. In theory, the off-spring of such a union faced considerable social and political handicap. Firstly, their status became guaranteed

as nwadei or akpe (princess) only by the ritual of nmo ime i.e. "the cult of pregnancy". For reasons not explained the Ashimadei or royal drummer is the only ndichie exempt from the nmo-ime ritual. His daughter could marry and raise children for a nwadei without undergoing the ritual of purification. Even so, they were still kept away from the major state offices. It must be stressed however that the maintainance of an exclusive class by the umudei is still carried to such an extent that custom requires that any alien wife had to undergo the ritual of nmo ime or the child would be 'illegitimate' to the group.

An ndichie nta could by special rituals, attain a position synonymous with the umudei, but this only for religious purposes. Thus, a nwadei who died without a heir could designate one of his slaves to offer sacrifice to his ofo and related shrines. Such a chosen slaves had to undergo the ritual of igoya n'obi, i.e. "to serve into the fold or lineage", after which he assumed the name ukodei. It becomes obvious that in spite of the web of social relationship that interlinks every Aboh, the two classes of umudei, and ndichie are discrete and rigorously maintained.

V

An earlier discussion on kinship and residence stressed the overwhelming importance of descent in the social system.

The patrilineage (ummunadi) which is co-extensive with the compound (ogbe), as distinct from the maximal lineage (sector), was found to be the focal point of the kinship system. It was a religious and political unit with the component sub-lineages and households organized around the principal house or obulu. In this section, an effort will be made to show the historical development of the twenty six patrilineages in Aboh.[82] It will be observed that the patrilineage, or compound (ogbe) was much more than a descent group. It was above everything else an economic, military, and political unit around which long distance trade was organized. Such patrilineages, it must be stressed, are inherent in any process of lineage segmentation, and certainly pre-dated the era of the European slave and palm-oil trade. However, its character and composition was profoundly altered by this trade.

A fully developed patrilineage, ummunadi, compound or ogbe consisted of a principal house, and smaller houses usually arranged in the form of a U. Most often, the prongs of the U faced the Aboh creek, with the principal house located at the base.[83] Its personnel comprised of the head of the compound (okpala) who was often a titled man. For example, a large proportion of Aboh titles correspond to the names of these compounds, and may have originated as the names of their founders.[84] Others were his wives, sons and brothers, ndichie dependents and slaves. The process about to be described will be clear from an

examination of the formation of the various compounds in Onuobikwu (Fig. 10). The compounds, originated as single rooms or houses within the Obi's own household, as when a grown up son leaves his father to build his own house. It is therefore at this latter level that our analysis must begin.

A farmer, but more usually a merchant of some substance, took the initial step towards breaking away from his residential group when he began increasing the number of his wives and acquiring slaves. The acquisition of slaves and 'dependents' and their incorporation into the patrilineage apparently constituted the main source of population increase in pre-twentieth century Aboh.

Strong evidence supports such a hypothesis. First, there is a correlation between the rapid rate of lineage segmentation and the period of the slave trade.[85] Second, available documentation on the founders of some of the compounds show conslusively that they held many slaves. In this regard, it is of some interest to observe that while population has continued to increase by natural means, the 'compounds' seem to have been forzen at twenty-six since the last quarter of the nineteenth century.[86] For example, no new compounds have been created in Onuobikwu (Fig. 10) since the era of the children of Obi Ossai I. Third, it is known from scattered evidence, written and oral, that the slaves held by the principal men far outstripped the

number of their children. For example, Chukwumah the eldest son of Obi Ossai I, had only a son, but he had something in the neighborhood of 100 slaves at mid-century. His junior brother Okeyea had another hundred and although we do not possess figures as to the number of his children, it would be unusual if he had as many as 100.[87] This fact is duplicated by other examples but the accompanying statistical table, showing the number of wives and children of the principal men in mid-nineteenth century Aboh, indicate that increase by natural process was unusually low.

TABLE 4, NUMBER OF WIVES AND CHILDREN OF MAJOR ABOH HEADMEN

	Age	Wives		Children	
		Living	Dead	Living	Dead
Aje Ugboma	40	80	40	uncertain	uncertain
Amorama (Judge)	40	4	2	2	6
Ozama (Headman)	35	4	2	2	6
Omenibo (Headman)	32	3	2	3	6
Amebah (Headman)	28	4	1	3	6
Magog (Bugler)	34	2	1	6	3
Ambili (Headman)	35	3	2	3	11
Ogron (Headman)	30	3	1	2	2
Obi Ossai	44	110	uncertain	uncertain	uncertain

Source: J. O. MacWilliam, Medical History of the Expedition to the Niger during the Years 1841-2. (London, 1843), p. 63.

Admittedly inconclusive, the figures do indicate that while the birthrate may have been fairly high, owing partly to protein supply from abundant fish, infant mortality was exceptionally high. On a rough count, only something like a third of the children born reached adulthood. It is obvious then that these men, even with the generous help of kinsmen, would have been unable to organize the long distance trade with much success.

The size of a man's household determined the design of his house, but the successful merchant usually erected the quadrangular obulu. His wives and their respective children were each assigned a room, as were his brothers, older slaves and dependents. In addition, the older wives were assigned the younger slaves and other dependents. The slaves, kinsmen and dependents assigned to a senior wife along with her own children were constituted into a sub-household within the obulu known as ofu ime useku i.e. "one cooking place". As is the practice among other polygnous African groups, each sub-household was organized as a semi-independent socio-economic unit subordinated only to the authority and interests of the head of the total household.[88] The principal wives became a 'mother' to all the members of her unit, and they in turn her 'children'. As a domestic unit within the larger household, the members united in food production and trade, and the role of the 'mother' was generally to ensure that her household was not neglected by the master in the competition between co-wives for favor.

All the sub-households were however geared to the major concern of the total house--long distance trade and large-scale agriculture. The master often ran a farm, and once in the Igbo-week of four days, his sons and dependents were expected to labor for him, but trade was the reason d'etre of the corporation. His sons, kinsmen, dependents and slaves rowed the canoes, fought when the need arose, and generally organized the trade into far away places. But while every member of the house participated in this and other activities,much of the work devolved upon the slaves. Captain William Allen probably did not exaggerate when he asserted that all commercial transactions and field labor in Aboh were performed by slaves.[89]

A new dependent or slave might expect to begin his career as a paddler which in the language of the coast was a pulla-boy. A large number of pulla-boys were required for the large trading and war canoes. In 1832 for example, Oldfield reported that one of the vessels of Obi Ossai had

> twenty pulla boys on each side; which with one steering at the bow and another at the stern made a total of forty four .... These were fine youths, about nineteen or twenty years of age with good flexible muscles.[90]

During the trips to the northern markets, the 'members' of the house, sons, slaves etc. were often able to participate in some personal trade. For example, they could sell the produce of their farms, as well as other articles of trade which they could dispose of, to their own advantage. Although opportunities were open to all industrious members

of the house irrespective of status, the best chances for advancement went to actual sons of the leader of the house. It is perhaps no coincidence that five of the six compounds in Onuobikwu were founded by sons of Obi Ossai, some of whom led trading expeditions on behalf of the monarch.

In the meantime increasing returns from trade and agricultural activities enabled the leader of the house to expand his household. More wealth meant more wives, slaves, and a higher status which in turn attracted dependent ndichie ukwu. This in turn called for territorial expansion, for, as a new 'member' joined the more mature ones, sons, kinsmen and slaves were provided with wives and plots for single house units in the U-shaped compound. Segmentation occurred when either a successful son, kinsman, dependent or slave accumulated enough wealth to acquire more wives and slaves and other property than could be accommodated within the compound. Among the Itsekiri, the aim of any successful trader was to found his own independent village from where he directed his commercial activities.[91] Among the Aboh, he merely branched off to erect either an obulu or a larger house in the vicinity of his parent compound, and the process already described began all over. More wealth, more wives and slaves, and the more successful ones broke off to start on their own. It is thus easy to envision the process which resulted in the sub-division of the palace organization of Obi Ossai I, and the establishment of the compounds which now

constitute Onuobikwu. It must be stressed that the process is not restricted to actual sons of house leaders or the principal merchants. The case of Azaka, a slave who broke off to establish his own compound, has been noted. In Onuobikwu, Ogbe Asamasa was founded not by a son of Obi Ossai, but by one Asamasa, an ndichie of prince Aje. The process of lineage fission which results in the establishment of a new compound is known by the Aboh as ikwa ogbe.

It must be said that the career described above is not easy to accomplish. Aboh traditions say that certain criteria had to be met, the chief of which was the aspirant's ability to equip a war canoe.[92] The Aboh call this ikwaya ugbo. The equipping of a war canoe was not a random stipulation. The accummulation of enough wives and slaves to justify leaving one's original compound presupposes some amount of success in trade. But long distance trade was full of many hazards, for the Niger was infested with rival traders who turned to piracy on occasions. Besides, the various communities lining its course regarded those parts of the Niger adjacent to their villages, as constituting their "territorial waters", and were prone to attack intruders. Traditions collected at Ndoni and Okpai along with Aboh traditions tell of perennial attacks by the Onitsha, and Anam.[93] The Landers were themselves the object of such piratical intent near Asaba.[94] Some of the inhabitants of the Niger Valley, wrote the explorers, are mild, but

> others are bold, cruel and rapacious, and are dreaded and shunned not only by their neighbours, but by those whom business may lead this way, unless they go in large strong and well armed parties.95

Although the six canoes in which the Landers were being taken to Aboh were armed, it was found necessary "to keep a watchful eye on the bank when we were compelled to pass it close, by keeping the channel in order to guard against surprise by an ambuscade." For this purpose two men kept watch, "armed with a musket and cutlass in each hand to intimidate the natives."96

One may be protected by his master's war canoes as long as one remained within the fold, but on leaving it, one faced the responsibility of providing one's own military escort. It was precisely because of the protection 'war' canoes afforded that they acquired such significance in a purely social sphere. They were a sine qua non for any patrilineage. Armed canoes constituted the very hub of the long distance trade, and thus were a key variable in the fisionary process and the emergence of new compounds. The possession of "a good canoe" by Azaka has been observed to be the beginning of his fortunes and his successful break-away. In the Niger Delta, the trading corporation or 'House' comprised of freemen and slaves, under the leadership of a 'chief' revolved around the canoe, hence the term 'canoe-house' used to describe it. The Ijo rendition of the canoe-house, wari which is also 'ward' corresponds to the Aboh patrilineage or ogbe and in both cases, the canoe was crucial because of

its role in trade. In both societies, the canoe became a key determinant of the kinds of units into which the society was sub-divided.[97]

Now, the 'equipping' of a canoe with arms and men involved a heavy financial outlay. From the great social prestige which attached to the possession of slaves, it is obvious that they must have been difficult to acquire. For example, a great feast was called when an individual acquired his first slave. Sacrifice was offered to his 'right hand of fortune'--ikenga-- (Plate III) and a manilla was placed on the shrine. In everyday conversation the individual would be said to have kwo aka inyama (lit: to have washed off the hands of a novice). It was such a symbol of status that an Aboh who had not acquired a slave considered it the worst insult to be asked: "Have you washed your hands of inyama?"[98] Arms, notably cannon, were not easy to come by either, particularly where trade was monopolized, as at Aboh, by the monarch. But like capital, slaves, once acquired, tended to generate wealth. In time, the prospective house leader was able to acquire enough men and arms to equip canoes. According to traditions, which are confirmed by written evidence, Aboh war canoes held up to seventy men, most of whom were armed with muskets, swords, and spears. The canoes were provided with boarding pikes and one heavy cannon was stationed in the bow.[99]

An individual who thought he had enough men and arms

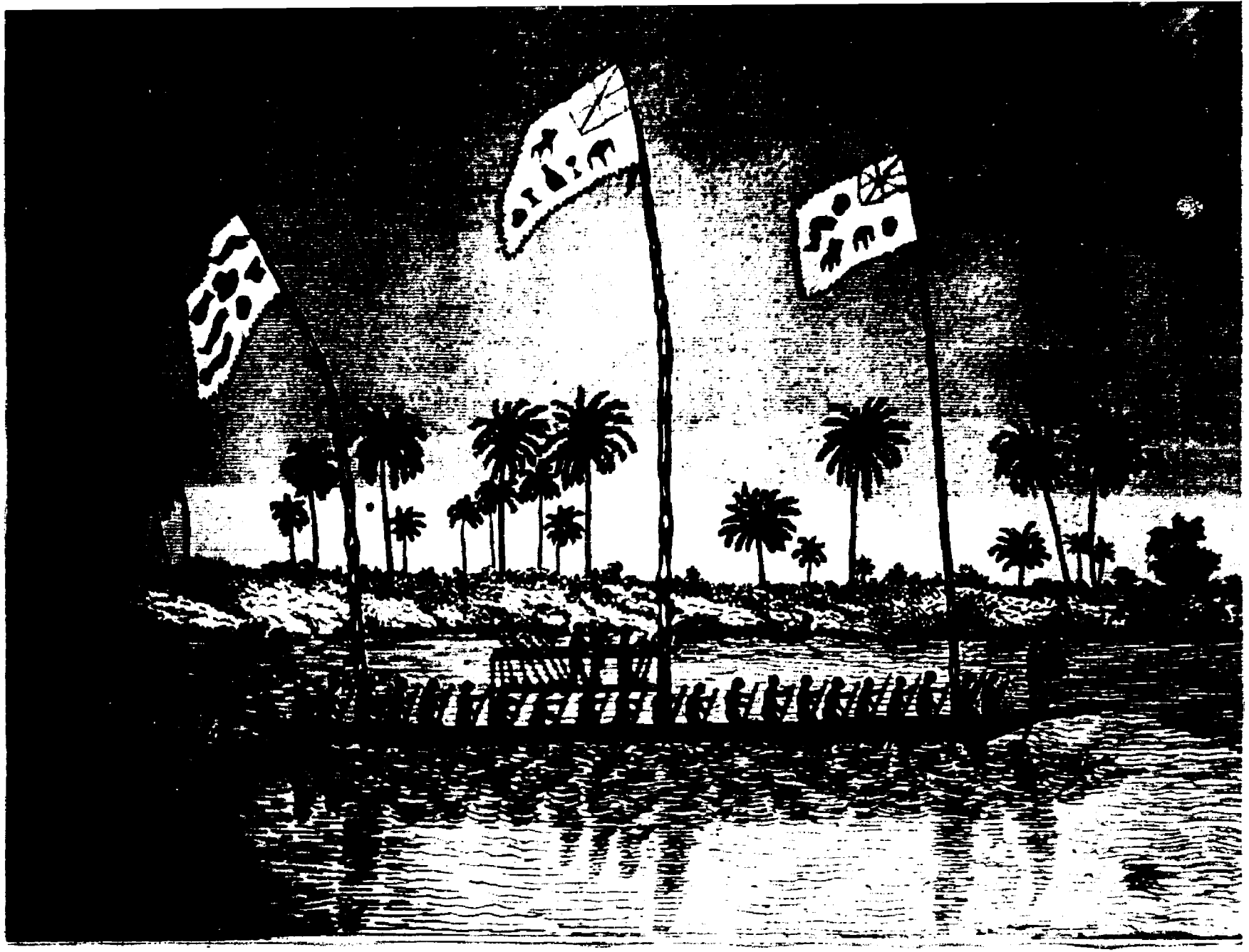


Plate II. Aboh War Canoe in 1830
Observe the Cannon Mounted at the Bow

to equip his own trading mission notified the leader of his household who then announced that his ward was about to 'come out'. The occasion was a festive one, and cannon shots rang out as the bedecked canoe emerged with its crew , displaying their arms. The occasion provided an opportunity to 'catch the eye' of the Obi who might recognize the addition to his Kingdom's naval strength by 'conferring' a 'title' on the individual. In any event, he became an important person in the kingdom, and one the Obi had to take into consideration in his foreign and domestic policies. The Aboh say that it was unconventional for anyone to 'equip' a canoe i.e. kwaya ugbo, until his father, real or putative, had done so. This convention is observed to this day in the Igbu title society.[100] It would, however, appear to be a rationalization of the fact that segmentation was difficult, and that only the sons or slaves of the very wealthy few, were in a position to expand and found their own compounds. This was particularly so in Aboh were the king had a near monopoly of trade. It is thus no coincidence that the sectors providing the highest numbers of kings in Aboh --Umuojugbali and Umuozegbe--have the highest number of compounds. In every case the ancestral founders were either the sons of kings, their dependents, or their slaves.[101]

One major difference between the operation of the Aboh ogbe and the Delta wari must be noted. In the Delta, the death of the leader or chief of a canoe-house was followed

Plate III. Ikenga or "The Right Hand of Fortune"

by an election in which all the male members of the 'house' freely elected a new leader who could be a slave or freeman. All that was needed was a proven ability to lead the corporation in competition against the other houses.[102] This element of free election was absent in Aboh. Here only an actual son could succeed his father, usually, one who at the time of his father's death, had not branched off. Where no heir was available, the others simply divided the property of the compound. One after the other, its members left to join the households that earlier sprung from it, and it was left to whither away. The difference here could be accounted for by the fact that the Niger Delta was characterized by intense rivalry, whereas Aboh had no strong rivals on the Valley and so had no spur to alter the traditional system of inheritance and succession.

The rate of expansion was not uniform, and much depended on the resourcefulness of the individual leaders. The dynamics of the lineage segmentation under such competitive circumstances was such that some compounds expanded while those unable to accumulate capital contracted. Most heads of compounds, according to available data, commanded "from two to six war canoes",[103] but the king commanded far more war canoes, a consequence no doubt of his virtual trade monopoly. Thus, Obi Ossai I was said to own fifteen canoes of different rates, all of which were well provisioned with arms and men.[104] It was from such a secure base that his sons built up their own fortunes. Aje at mid-century had

"four large war canoes" and about 250 slaves, but his less successful elder brother Chukwumah had only 100 slaves and "five smaller canoes".[105]

Although this discussion of lineage segmentation has thus far centered on the role of males, there were no barriers to the acquisition of slaves by the opposite sex. Women 'equipped' war canoes and like males, supplied the Obi with canoes in the event of a foreign campaign. Traditions specifically remember one Ojobo as a great owner of slaves and war canoes.[106] From calculations made on the basis of the genealogies, Ojobo lived in the first half of the nineteenth century, and could have been the 'fat' woman whose acquaintance Macgregor Laird made in 1832. According to Macgregor Laird, she was

> mistress of more than two hundred slaves, whom she employed in collecting palm-oil and cultivating yams ....

Laird and Oldfield later visited her and discovered that she was indeed a wealthy merchant, "with several canoes which she employed trading on the river both above and below Eboe [Aboh]".[107] Women certainly founded no compounds, or else their names would have been preserved in the histories of the various wards.

VI

The political organization of Aboh is a combination of the kinship system, the economically-oriented compound, and

the three-tiered stratification of umudei, ndichie ukwu and ndichie nta.

At the grass-roots, the heads of the various sub-lineages are expected to manage the affairs of the ogbe or compound under the leadership of its head who is also styled as okpala (elder). Anthropolists have applied the term 'Council' to the governing body at this level, thereby imbuing it with some formal administrative mechanism.[108] In practice, governmental activities are none existent except for minor disputes, often matrimonial in nature, which the okpala sits to settle along with other elders. In principle, the okpala distributes farm land and provides members with plots for houses, but the sub-lineages and extended families have farmed specific plots for so long, that no formal permission is sought from the okpala to cultivate it, neither do they really expect him to dispossess them. In any event, the okpala does not have too much of a lever as members of the group could and do go outside to obtain farming land.

It must be stressed that the okpala ogbe was a much more powerful force in the past. He was often the founder of a compound by the process already described or someone who inherited the position. The economic orientation of the Aboh compound forbade any pretensions to democracy so that the okpala was more often a 'dictator', taking decisions, and punishing his wards without reference to anyone. The authority exercised by men like Nwadei Okeyea and Nwadei Aje is certainly

incompatible with the idealized okpala sitting as primus-inter-pares with other elders in judgment.

In modern times, the sector has an okpala who should be the oldest male in the sector, and recruited from any social class.[109] The okpala of the constituent compounds met in his house to settle disputes and discuss matters of sectional concern, e.g. setting of dates for festivals, when to declare the fish lakes open etc. Again however, the okpala plays no role of practical importance. It is not known how important this office was in the past but, given the overwhelming importance of the lower level compounds, it is doubtful if they ever existed, much less play significant political roles.

By comparison with the rest of Igbo-country east of the Niger (with the exception of Onitsha), Aboh is a highly centralized polity. This accounts for the striking absence of any real power at the lower levels of the social structure. The most pervasive institution of government is the izu olinzele or "society of titled men", at the apex of which are the Oduah and the Obi. The Olinzele reflects the stratification of the society into three discrete social classes viz: Umudei, Ndichie-ukwu and ndichie nta. The title system is so structured that people are eligible for titles ordinarily open to their social class. Within each class, the titles are ranked in colleges, but the order of seniority of these titles seem either to have been lost or were never formally ranked.

There are five titled colleges in the Umudei class.

College I

1. Oduah
2. Ndanike
3. Ozea[110]
4. Akpanuka[111]

College II

5. Akpolosu
6. Okiya Nzenabi[112]
7. Ikogwe Aje [113]
8. Azaka Onukpala[114]

College III

9. Ochiagha
10-25 Omodi[115]

College IV

26-29 Okwa Ossai Ukwu[116]

College V

30-33 Okwa Umu[117]

The ndichie social class possess five colleges

College I

1. Iyasele
2. Onise Ogene[118]
3. Ozoma Onia[119]
4. Isagba Ajie[120]
5. Ojingwu

College II

6. Ajuwa Ukomenenyi
7. Ogini
8. Igboba
9. Ube
10. Onoko
11. Isama Akwe
12. Uzhi

College III

13. Sanza Osagwali
14. Agba
15. Akpashi

College IV

21. Damanza Gbada
22. Ose
23. Akalamu

16. Uti
17. Odogwu Abi
18. Sanza Ajie
19. Okpigbe
20. Agwaba
24. Ukodei Aje
25. Owele
26. Okulide
27. Ojeba
28. Ubo
29. Ojunwala
30. Ojuto
31. Okuku
32. Obe
33. Otono
34. Onodi

College V

35. Eze Osumili
36. Ashimadei
37. Onu Eze
38. Iso

The Aboh title system calls for some preliminary comments. Firstly, it is obvious that one can no longer obtain the history of every title. Secondly, and this flows from the first, no definite knowledge can now be obtained about the historical development of the colleges. Since the titles and colleges have grown by accretion, it is obvious that there were not always ten colleges. Thirdly it seems clear, from the conflicting evidence one hears from the various chiefs, that the ranking of the titles is now lost. Perhaps the only thing one can be certain about is that the two major title groups viz:

umudei and ndichie have remained discrete over a fairly long period, with the politically more significant titles falling within the umudei orbit. The two groups do not mix, and at every meeting, the Umudei sit at the left hand of the Obi or Oduah while the Ndichie sit on the right. The same sitting arrangement is observed even during religious ceremonies. Any Umudei offering sacrifice would have the umudei on his left and the ndichie on his right. An Ndichie would, also sit umudei on his left and his fellow ndichie on his right. This rigid stratification is also observed when the king dies. As part of the rituals, his body is borne to the royal cemetry by sixteen citizens, made up of eight ndichie and eight umudei on either side of the coffin or akpuleke.

According to Aboh traditions, the various titles were created by the various Obi at different times in the history of the kingdom. There is however little indication as to which titles were created by a particular Obi. In recent times, there have developed squabbles as to the rank of some titles, and what functions were in the past attached to them. It would seem that a good proportion of the titles were not created with any pre-conceived function in mind. What functions a titled man performed, were in most cases the consequences of his personality. If he was forceful, he performed a number of duties and was always at court; if he was weak charactered, he did little and was hardly consulted by the Obi. As a matter of fact, most of the titles appear to be the praise names of some of the most

notable individuals in Aboh history.

For example, the much coveted title of Ndanike originated as the praise name of Aje, one of the many sons of Obi Ojugbali I. Born somewhere in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Aje became a successful trader, and later established his own compound. He was also a renowned warrior and was said to have called himself Ndanike, a praise name which signified his proverbial super human power.[121] Whether or not Aje was formally invested with a title by the Obi is a moot question, but there can be no doubt that he was a major political figure in his days. Since his death, his descendants have continued to be invested with the 'title' of Ndanike, which is now institutionalized in the kingdom's title system.

The Ozea and Akpanuka were primarily ritual aids to the Obi, the latter acting as the monarch's 'doctor' and special medicine man during battles. Like the title of Ndanike, they probably originated from the names of historical figures. The existence of a compound named after Akpanuka--Ogbe Akpanuka-lends credence to this hypothesis. The title of Akpolosu was conferred on the eldest son of an Obi,who by convention sat with the other titled men in council with the king. But he ceased to be of any constitutional importance on the death of the king. The title is said to have been conferred first in the reign of Obi Ogwezi, and has continued uninterrupted since that time.[102] The Ochiagha (war leader), and the titled young men--omodi, okwa ossai ukwu and okwa umu

--were military personnel and were usually led in battles by the ochiagha.

There are a few non-controversial offices, and obvious example being that of the Oduah. Although no traditions about this office have survived, it would appear to have been older than the other titles, including perhaps the obiship. Unlike the others it has well defined functions, and does not owe its existence to any act of appointment. On the death of an Oduah, the oldest male umudei automatically assumes office. His position is analogous to the okpala of a typical Igbo village group, but the Oduah's political and ritual powers are real. Like the Obi, the Oduah had the right to ma ekwe i.e. issue announcements and assemble the olinzele to his residence. Decisions reached here are regarded as valid as those enacted by the Obi and his titled men. It was he who anointed (ido nzu) and crowns (ikpume okpu) the Obi. No one could legitimately ascend the throne without these rituals.

The position of the Oduah is reminiscent of the period of Aboh history when there was no Obi, and during which the oldest man took control of the community. Among the Binis, such village elders were regarded as odion. Since the office of Oduah is confined to the Bini originated kingdoms, the word Oduah could be a corruption of odion. This is however purely conjectural. The position today is that the Oduah acts as regent during an interregnum, but this is probably a late development. There is no mention of the office of Oduah in any of the nineteenth century records. Indeed, the 'regent' after the death of Obi Ossai was reported to be the Isagba and not the Oduah. According to Reverend Crowther who visited him, his constitutional

role was keeping "the suits and articles used by the king", but at the time, he was acting as "President of Aboh", and in this new capacity, "all important matters are referred to him for decision."[123]

It is obvious then that the role of the Oduah as a 'regent' is fairly recent. Indeed, it is doubtful if the senile men who occupied this office could have been able to govern effectively in the turbulent Niger Valley of the nineteenth century.

The most important and non-controversial Ndichie title is that of Iyasele or 'First Lord'. As head of the entire ndichie class, the Iyasele is accorded the praise name eze ndichie (king of the ndichie), and was the commander of all Aboh war canoes in foreign battles. Aboh traditions are obscure on the origins of the Iyasele title. One version asserts that the Benin immigrants brought the title with them, but the convention regarding the descent of the holders of the office indicate that its origins are to be sought within Aboh. For example, the mother of an Iyasele must be an akpe i.e. female of the umudei class while his father is of the ndichie ukwu (free immigrants). Nzimiro asserts that the objective of this convention was

> to ensure that the person who holds this important political office of the non-royal group should not subvert the position of the Obi. Obedience to the royalty is implicit in this arrangement of an Iyasele's maternal link with the royalty.[124]

While this is plausible it does not explain why and how

someone with this background reached the position of chief executive in a polity dominated by a different social class. The Iyasele's descent is proof of an early process of intermarriage between an intrusive group and the aborigines, and while the choice of the first Iyasele was probably random, later Obi's continued the practice because potentially 'subversive' relatives were thereby kept at arm's length

Dr. Nzimiro has further suggested that the Iyasele's position as personal servant of the Obi is more strongly emphasized at Aboh than at Oguta, Onitsha or Ossomari, and that it reflects the subordinate political status of the ndichie class. This is borne out by a closer examination of the organization of the Aboh title system. The chieftaincy structure is divided into two, the Town chiefs coterminous with the Umudei titles, and the Palace chiefs coinciding with the Ndichie titles. While the former group is primarily concerned with political and religious matters, most of the ndichie titles are in practice held by court officials and 'servants'. Such services range from the preparation of the king's meals to laughing in his behalf. To ensure the continuation of such vital services, the Obi actually confers titles equivalent to those held by some ndichie on his wives who may act instead of the real title holders. Nzimiro puts it this way:

> The comparing of a title status, with the status of a wife's title, is politically derogatory, particularly in a society where a woman's position is not highly rated. That is why the

> Ndichie titles are regarded as royal domestic services oriented titles, associated with the royal palace, and when they do not perform this function, the Obi's wives are automatically allowed to perform them so that the palace domestic rituals could be carried out.[125]

The duties attached to some of the ndichie titles bear out the outline of the above statement. For example, the Odogwu abi is the public executioner while the Ose carries the Obi on his shoulders during the latter's nocturnal rounds. Not being human, the Obi was not supposed to show one of the attributes of human failing by crying, so the owele mourns on his behalf. The obhe clears the table after olinzele feasts while the Onodi ojidei (one who holds the pillar) takes hold of a pillar (presumably a special pillar) whenever the Obi is in consultation with the other title holders. He also laughs in behalf of the Obi. The Ashimadei is the palace drummer, and his historical subservience to the king is evidenced by the fact that the Obi provides him with a wife and a house after 'three' years on the drums. The Agwaba prepares the Obi's meals once in the Aboh week of eight days--on olie ukwu[126]

But the analogy must not be overstretched, for these offices are not perceived by present day Aboh in terms of superiors and subordinates. Rather, the people view them as the interplay of rights and obligations. Finally, none of the Aboh titles are hereditary, although a few have in practice remained in a lineage, usually that of its orginator. There exists so much pride in a linage title that members of

the family will sooner loan money to undergo the necessary rites than see the title taken by someone else.

At the apex of the hierarchy is the Obi. The outer form of the Aboh monarchy is distinctly Bini as are the kingship rituals, regalia etc. But its superimposition on a local socio-economic milieu has had a significant impact on its character. Historically, the basis of the Obi's authority would seem to have rested on his position as the chief prest and custodian of the ancestral ofo nze about which something has been said in the introductory chapter. It is conceivable that the Obi started out as one of the sons, or close kin of the 'founder' of the kingdom ritually deputed to offer sacrifice to the ofo of the ancestral founder. Contrary to popularly held notions, the Igbo word Obi, at least among the Aboh, is not synonymous with the Benin title oba (king). Obi rendered phonetically as òbí means "someone with full membership in a lineage i.e. pure blooded", hence the ritual igoya n'òbí, by which an ndichie, acquires full membership of the obi.[127] In point of fact òbí is a proper name and any Aboh person may choose to be called obi without sounding unusual.

Indeed, the Obi's principal functions to this day are priestly, and while no one else may perform these functions (sacrifice to the isu osimili[128] and ofo nze), political power is shared with the Oduah. As chief priest of the ofo nze and one in the long line of ancestors, the Obi was neither

an ordinary political leader nor a mortal. He was the divine vessle by which his predecessors ensured the fertility of the soil, safety from attack, and the vitality and continuity of the nation. His chief duties were thus perceived as maintaining the bonds of ritual communion with the past Obi by annual sacrifice at the ujẹ festival. The sanctity of his office lay in the fact that these functions were deemed to be basic to the well-being of Aboh and only a legimately annointed Obi may perform them.

But Aboh's involvement in the long distance trade, which as we saw, profoundly affected the social structure, exerted an equally powerful influence on the concept and authority of the Obi. By initially participating, and later exercising an effective monopoly over the port trade of Aboh, the Obi's image was, over the years, transformed from that of a sacred being and priest to that of a wealthy and powerful merchant prince. The process of lineage segmentation has shown that the Obi were the richest men in their days, and the documented career of Obi Ossai I bears eloquent testimony to the unrivalled power and wealth of Aboh kings.[129]

D. Forde and G. I. Jones were mistaken in asserting that the Obiship is hereditary.[130] It is in principle an elective office, but it does not rotate between gates. In practice however, the sound economic base built up by earlier Obi has tended to restrict the competition to a few direct descendants of former kings. The problem of how and by whom the Obi was elected calls for some attention. In 1841, Captain Allen

recorded that the Aboh sovereign was "elected by a council of sixty elders or chiefs of the large villages".[131] The implication of this evidence is that in the course of the nineteenth century, or even earlier, an Obi was chosen by a council in which tributary villages were represented. Candidates were put forward by the various umudei lineages, usually but not necessarily, on a sectional basis. In the past, a candidate's competence was determined by several factors, amongst which were the size of his compound and the number of war canoes he commanded.[132] Wars with rival neighbors were frequent, and it was necessary to get the strongest man at the command of the city's affairs. Recourse was also had to oracles to determine the choice of the ancestors.[133]

Disputes were not uncommon, and these tended to be both bitter and protracted. The Belgian explorer, Adolphe Burdo, who reached Aboh in the 1880's observed that the bloody conflicts occasioned by the election disputes gave "rise to severe reprisals and to frequent plots against the life of the king".[134] While traditions do not bear out such deep divisiveness, the statement is nevertheless a near-correct assessment of Aboh society. The electors in some cases exerted a powerful influence, and contestants, as in the contest following the death of Obi Ossai I, incurred heavy expenses in trying to woo their support. It would seem however, that they had little force with which to back up their decision, and that a powerful sectional 'chief' or

constestant could disregard their ruling with impunity.[135]

But once chosen, and anointed, he was transformed into a divine being, feared and respected by all of his subjects. Everyone, including the titled men, addressed him in a kneeling position with their fore-heads in the dust. It is the custom at Eboe (Aboh) wrote Oldfield,

> when the king is out, and indeed indoors as well, for the principal people to kneel on the ground and kiss it three times when he passes. We were met by several of the superior class of people who performed this submissive act without hesitation.[136]

He was marked off from the populace by a ceremonial red gown, a conical red crown covered all over with coral beads, a barrel-shaped frame of coral beads worn over his neck, and anklets and wristlets of like material. Indeed, Obi Ossai I had so much coral about him that the Landers humorously styled him the "Coral King".[137] As a measure of his divine nature, he never ate in the presence of any one, neither was he supposed to show the failings of mortals by crying. A titled man was set aside to perform this task. Even so, he was not supposed to exhibit that other weakness of common man--excitment and laughter. He never left his palace ordinarily except at night, and when he did so, he was to be carried on somebody's shoulders. Titled men went ahead announcing his approach and ordering mortals to keep out of sight. In some sense, every citizen was the Obi's 'servant' for after every war, slaves and booty were presented to him by all the principal men. The least opportunity was

seized upon to acquaint foreigners with his immeasurable power. Thus in 1832 when Obi Ossai I visited Macgregor Laird on board the Alburkah, he was escorted by seven war canoes, each of which held seventy men.[138]

Yet, the Obi was no despot. Although his power depended largely on the force of his character and the amount of material force he could command, he was in principle limited by the Olinzele whom he had to consult on major issues. "The king", wrote Captain William Allen, "has the power of life and death only by consent of the Council".[139] Any monarch who made himself obnoxious, observed Allen, was not deposed but secretly poisoned by the elders. Burdo added that Aboh kings had become so suspicious of their subjects that they "never touched food without having it first tasted by somebody about them.[140] The latter practice is to this day common in Aboh, and does not appear to have been the result of the Obi's fear. Any one presenting his guests with food, kolanuts or dinks was expected to taste it first. Commandant Mattei informs us that Obi Imegwu whom he knew very well was actually poisoned.[141] But there are no evidence from traditions which suggests that the Aboh invariably poisoned unpopular kings. The only instance preserved in the traditions is the assassinatinn of Obi Ozegbe and this was achieved without recourse to poison. On the other hand, the unusually brief reigns ascribed by traditions to the kings are suggestive of some foul play.

In the following chapter, our attention will be turned to the early history of Aboh, in so far as this could be reconstructed from a combination of oral data and written documents.

NOTES

[1]Idu is the Igbo word for Benin.

[2]W. B. Baikie, op. cit., p. 50.

[3]The ofobo is actually a nine mile footpath, often overgrown by tall side grasses. It is broken up in about five places by deep ponds of mud and water. There are no bridges, and the people pull snags across these ponds to serve as bridges. They not infrequently fall when it is shippery. At the far end- enu oko- the market women are ferried to Ashaka along the Ase creek, a canoe trip of about one and a half hours.

[4]J. F. Schon and S. Crowther, Journals of the Reverend James Frederick Schon and Mr. Samuel Crowther who accompanied the Expedition up the Niger in 1841 (London, 1842), p. 56.

[5]It is doubtful if these creeklets have been further deepened since the end of the nineteenth century. Some of them are however still about three feet deep, particularly at the point where they connect with the plaza. Thus, they must have been very deep in the past.

[6]S. Crowther, Journal of an Expedition up the Niger and Tshadda Rivers ... in 1854 (London, 1854), p. 190.

[7]We are actually informed that the Aboh consider the flood season the healthiest, and "dread very much the approach of the dry season, as they are subject to much disease". See Schon and Crowther, op. cit., p. 228.

[8]This house plan is more common among the Ijo of the Delta.

[9]Lander and Lander, op. cit., 2, p. 210.

[10]Ibid., p. 212.

[11]William Allen and T. R. Thomson, A Narrative of the Expedition to the River Niger, 2 Vols. (London, 1848), 1, pp. 248-9.

[12]Schon and Crowther, op. cit., p. 335.

[13]A. Mockler-Ferryman, Up the Niger: Narrative of Major Claude Macdonald's Mission to the Niger and Benue Rivers (London, 1892), p. 35.

[14]Lander and Lander, op. cit., I, p. 218.

[15]Aboh, interview with Nos. 1, 2, 23 Appendix A, 5 March, 1970.

[16]W. Cole, Life on the Niger, or Journal of an African Trader (London, 1862), p. 17.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Ibid., p. 16-17. The method employed in large scale oil manufacture has changed but little since Cole wrote in the 1850s.

Instead of a pit, the palm-nuts, referred to in pidgeon English by the manufacturers as 'banger' are gathered together in a large wooden trough, built from old canoe parts, a number of men climb into this trough and begin to "march" the nuts. In this way the oil is squeezed out of the nut. This process takes some days, depending on the amount of labour, available and the quantity of palm-nuts in the trough. Water is then added and after a brisk stirring process the contents of the trough is left to settle. The nuts and the fibrous matter from which the oil has been squeezed (i.e. the shaffs) sink to the bottom of the trough, leaving the oil afloat. A stopper lodged at the upper reaches of the trough is then removed allowing only the oil to filter into containers where it is boiled and got ready for the market.

[19]The sociology of migrant farmers is one of the least studied themes in Nigerian economic history. The earliest known reference to the Urhobo and Isoko migrant workers system is in W. Waddington Hubbard's: The Sobo of the Niger Delta, but it is by no means detailed.

The country between the Ase and the Niger is according to Hubbard interspersed with "numerous Sobo Isoko villages and hamlets". They are "all of them emigrants from the Sobo country proper .... The Eastern Sobo come here because they are ukane people. Ukane is an Isoko word meaning 'to leave one's home and go and earn money in a foreign country' it being understood that the money will be earned by gathering palm produce and selling it. Eastern Sobo, and to a lesser extent the Western Sobo [Urhobo] are experts in the preparation of palm-oil and palm-kernels ...." Hubbard described the ukane

process in the following words: "When any of them wish to to to ukane, a party will be formed and they will visit the land owners, in say the Aboh territories ...., and make a bargain with them; this is usually to the effect that the landowners will allow the ukane party to build a small village on their land and gather palm-nuts on condition that so much rent is paid for the land, and so much royalty charged on all produce sold. When all is arranged, the ukane party fetch their wives and children and possessions and settle down in their new homes. How long they stay will depend on various conditions; if times are bad and palm-produce commands but a low price, they may not be able to fulfill their contract with the landowners, and so have to depart after only a few months stay; in other circumstances they may stay for many years, perhaps permanently. Their relationship with the people on whose land they are living is usually friendly, and they may give their daughters in marriage to them".

Among the many ukane villages on Aboh-Igbo country named by Hubbard are Igabo-Iyede, Onogboko, Itebiege, and Udjedje. In most cases the original Igbo language of the land-lords is changed. At Utuoku for example, the Isoko language is largely spoken in place of Igbo. See J. W. Hubbard, The Sobo of the Niger Delta (Zaria, 1948), pp. 28-29, 142 and 283.

The ukane process continued to be important in the exploitation of the palm oil resources of the Aboh country. Ukane parties were still coming into Aboh in large numbers in the early decades of the twentieth century. Mr. I. R. P. Heslop, District Officer for Aboh who feared the consequences of the process thought that the Aboh were a slothful people and could not comprehend why on earth they should continue "renting out their material wealth for exploitation by strangers". Another District Officer, M. J. B. Mackay observed that the Isoko settlements paid rent varying from 20 to 30 shillings per head to the land owners. The process was so widespread, that for the Aboh, the size of settlers on one's land is an index of his wealth. Wrote Mackay: If you ask whether a man has money, they will say "why, yes, has he not a Sobo [Isoko] settlement on his land". See Kwale Dist. 4/9, K. 14/1929, and Kwale Dist. 1/141, Annual Report, Aboh Division, 1942.

[20]Mockler-Ferryman, op. cit., p. 34.

[21]There are said to be nine communally owned fishing lakes. This does not include a few, ownership of which is restricted to some compounds and sectors. The nine communal

lakes are Ofolo, Usha, Iyi Oji, Ofoboh, Onyeukwu, Elili, Mili ukwu, Otu and Ugo.

[22]One of the lakes - the mili ukwu - was fished when the present writer was at Aboh. The opportunity was thus seized to observe at first hand the process of lake fishing. The major gear used on the lakes is not the throw net, but a long piece of netting - ibolo - placed at intervals across the entire length of the lake. After some days, each party removes its own ibolo, which is seen to contain many fishes.

[23]Aboh, interview with No. 1. Appendix A, 5 March, 1970.

[24]It should be made clear at the onset of the discussion on handicraft that there is little evidence of any of the crafts listed in Aboh today.

[25]Lander and Lander, op. cit., p. 212.

[26]Ibid., p. 233.

[27]Motars and pestles and particularly religious objects are produced to this day, but not on a commercial scale.

[28]Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., 1, p. 384. Also Lander and Lander, op. cit., p. 219.

[29]On post and door sculpture on the Yoruba people, see G. J. Afolabi Ojo, Yoruba Culture: A Geographical Analysis, (London and Ife), 1966, pp. 241-242.

[30]Mrs. Ojiúzor Ugboma wife of the late chief Ugboma Opia Aje, and one of my informants, has a pair of elephant tusk wristlets on. According to Mrs. Ugboma they cost about £30 each in the 1920s when she first put them on. Her husband Chief Ugboma had been ill, and after he recovered, he decided to show his appreciation for his wife's services during his long illness by purchasing a pair of the ivory wristlets for her. It was a great festive occasion, in which a great number of people were entertained and sacrifice offered to the ancestors. The act of providing one's wife or daughter with these ornaments is regarded by the Aboh as a great feat. Interview with No. 17, in Appendix A. Dec., 1969.

[31]Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., 1, p. 392.

[32]Baikie, op. cit., p. 303.

[33]Ibid., p. 47.

[34]Allen and Thomson, op. cit., 1, p. 232.

[35]Adolphe Burdo, The Niger and the Benue (London, 1880), p. 152.

[36]Many lineage heads still possess these old brass ornamented ofo. The writer saw several of them in the various lineage shrines, many of which were identified by the lineage heads as those belonging to ancestors who lived in the 1840s. Informant No. 13, Appendix A in an interview at Ndoni, March, 1970 however stated that the brass ofo were brought for sale in Ndoni by Igbo brass smiths from Abiriba in Umuahia. If this testimony is true they could also have reached Aboh.

[37]Aboh, interview with No. 20 Appendix A, March, 1970.

[38]See for example Ikenna Nzimiro, "Chieftaincy and Politics in Four Niger States", (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation Cambridge University, 1966). C.S.O.26/3, File No. 26769, Williams, "Report on the Ibo Clans of the Kwale Division of the Warri Province", Captain E. A. Miller, "The Aboh Intelligence Report", April 1931.

[39]Umuozegbe is more commonly called Umuobi, but the name of its ancestral founder Ozegbe will be used in this work.

[40]Aboh, interview with No. 15 in Appendix A, March 1970, and No. 7 of Appendix A, at Lagos, Dec. 13, 1969. Chief Enebeli, the Ubo of Aboh added that even as late as the 1930s when he was a youngman, freedom of movement was largely restricted, and while the worst dangers had by now disappeared, one had to wrestle his way through the various sectors.

[41]The most important 'national' festival of the Aboh people is the ọjẹ, a masquerede dance in honour of the god Arishi. Arishi is the most dreaded of Aboh gods, for it is believed to have the power to kill evil doers, thiefs, bearers of false witnesses etc. Accordingly people who lost

their property or who thought they were the victims of bad medicine, called on Arishi to kill their adversaries.

But there are four Arishi shrines in Aboh, one for each sector, so that each sector celebrates its own oje. The festival is performed annually during the dry season, around December.

[42]Below is a table of the villages and their mother-sectors.

Umuogwezi	Umuojugbali	Umuossai	Umuozegbe
Abalagada	Umugboma	Iseonukpo	Isala
	Odugili	Abuato	
	Ugbaja	Okoliko	
	Ogbe Ogene	Edeagiliga	
Ise Ogudu	Elili		
	Obodougbome		

In addition, the village of Ase Omuku is said to be collectively owned by all Aboh, i.e. not belonging to any one sector in particular.

[43]See for example the genealogy of Ogbe Aje in Onuobikwu.

[44]Aboh, interview with Nos. 2, and 19, in Appendix A, March 1970.

[45]Lander and Lander, op. cit., 2, p. 212. Informant No.[45]Lander dix A also mentioned the fact that before Obi Ossai I, Umuossai was the northern extreme of Aboh, beyond which there were no sectors, or compounds.

[46]Cole, op. cit., pp. 42-3 Okeyea's age was estimated at between 33 and 35 years (b.1825?).

[47]Aboh, interview with Nos. 2 and 19 in Appendix A, March 1970.

[48]J. MacWilliam, Medical History of the Expedition to the Niger during the years 1841-2 (London, 1843), p. 62-3.

[49]Mr. L. O. Ijoma informs me that his ancestor Essumei, a younger son of Obi Ossai had initially lived with Chukwumah Okpalaobi, the eldest of Obi Ossai's children.

[50]Note that this analysis draws no distinction between Aje's actual children and his dependents and slaves. In keeping with Aboh usage, no distinction will be made.

[51]Aboh, interview with No. 4, in Appendix A, March, 1970.

[52]The essential truth of this tradition was demonstrated during the recent Nigerian Civil war. The Biafrans who landed troops in Aboh found it difficult to defend owing to difficulties in transporting supplies and equipment across the Niger. The Federal troops stationed in Ashaka, only 9 miles away found it even more difficult to retake Aboh owing to difficulties in traversing the ofobo road.

[53]C. K. Meek, op. cit., p. 7.

[54]Ibid.

[55]The Onitsha have three classes of ndichie viz: Ndichie ume; Ndichie Okwa; Ndichie Okwa Araze. For more details on the Onitsha political structure see Nzimiro op. cit.

[56]Aboh, interview with Nos. 2, 4, 5, 8 in Appendix A, March 1970. The following discussion on the social classes, where not otherwise footnoted, is based largely on information collected from these informants.

[57]Allen and Thomson, op. cit., 1, p. 218.

[58]C.O.2/24, Encl. P in No. 52, Captain Trotter to Lord Stanley, March 15, 1843.

[59]See estimate and authorities cited in Chapter two.

[60]Schon and Crowther, op. cit., pp. 232-233.

[61]Ibid.,p. 43.

[62]See for example, G. I. Jones, The trading States of the Oil Rivers, K. O. Dike, Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, and Alagoa, The Small Brave City-State.

[63]F.O. 84/2109. Report of Major Claude Macdonald, 9, Jan. 1890.

[64]Mockler-Ferryman, op. cit., p. 41.

[65]Cole, op. cit., p. 80.

[66]C.O. 2/24. Encl. P. in No. 52. Captain Trotter to Lord Stanley, March 15, 1843.

[67]The traditions which follows on the system of domestic slavery in Aboh was collected from several informants. The main sources however were Nos. 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 17, 23 in Appendix A.

[68]Samuel Crowther and J. C. Taylor, The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger; Journals and Notices of the Native Missionaries accompanying the Niger Expedition of 1857-1859 (London, 1859), p. 437.

[69]The provision of a wife for one's slave was a rather widespread practice, and the following case from a neighbouring town indicates just how seriously the convention was taken. In the 1920s, the Colonial Adminstration in Aboh was engaged in a fight to counter a widespread trade in slave. People who had been sold into slavery were tracked, and sent back to their original homes. In the course of this campaign the District Officer for Aboh came into the village of Onuabo, very close to Aboh where he met a young man by name Okpohoro, and Isoko from Igbide who had been sold into slavery. Interviewed as to his condition, the young man replied that he was quite satisfied with his position, his only complaint being that his late master's brother (who inherited him) "would not provide a wife for him, and he had to pay the dowry himself". See Kwale Dist. 1, File No. 62, Vol. 1.

[70]A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and D. Forde, (eds.), African Systems of Kinship and Marriage (Oxford, 1950), pp. 43-54.

[71]C.O. 2/24, Encl. F. in No. 52. Captain Trotter to Lord Stanley, 15, March 1843.

[72]Ibid.

[73]Baikie, op. cit., p. 315.

[74]Crowther and Taylor, op. cit., p. 437.

[75]Schon and Crowther, op. cit., pp. 231-232.

[76]Crowther and Taylor, op. cit., p. 438.

[77]Cole, op. cit., pp. 22-24.

[78]Allen and Thomson, op. cit., 1, p. 252.

[79]Ibid.

[80]F.O.84/2109. Report of Major Claude Macdonald, Jan. 9, 1890.

[81]Lagos, interview with No. 17, and 7 in Appendix A, Dec. 1970, and Aboh, interview with No. 2, March, 1970.

[82]I have retained the historical twenty one ogbe in the analysis which follows. It must be stressed however that some of them no longer exist. For example ogbe Uti in Onuobikwu has dissappeared partly owing to the incidence of erosion, the compound being located by the Aboh creek. Again the original Ogbe Okpalaobi has disappeared, but now rebuilt by members of that patrilineage as Obi ofu i.e. "new site". In Umuojugbali, Ogbe Uti no longer exists In general however it could be said that the internal dynamics of the cycle - growth of a patrilineage, segmentation and further growth and segmentation, or contraction, was responsible for their demise.

[83]The discussion which follows on the dynamics of the lineage system in Aboh draws from information from several of my informants, the major ones of which are Nos. 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 23 in Appendix A, March, 1970.

[84]Compare for example the titles, Otono Ikogwe, Oduah, Ndanike, Akpanuka, and Uti, with the names of the compounds in Table 2.

[85]It is evident from all the evidence at our disposal, both oral and written, that no new ogbe or compounds have been built since at least the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The newest sector Onuobikwu was begun about 1825, and its compounds were not built up until the 1850s. Therefore one can safely conclude that the great proliferation of compounds occurred between the founding of the kingdom and the first half of the nineteenth century. This period will be seen to co-incide with the Atlantic slave and oil trade It also points up one of the significant features of pre-colonial Aboh social system - the capacity to assimilate or absorb aliens into the various patrilineages.

[86]It might be said that modernization and industrialization have tended to draw people off into the urban centres in search of jobs. The impact of this factor on the society is not certain for no data exists to show how pervasive emigration has been. The writer concedes from personal experience that it is considerable, but this cannot be discussed in isolation from its component - the inauguration of British authority in Aboh which put an end to pre-colonial economic patterns.

[87]Cole, op. cit., p. 196.

[88]M. Wilson, "Nyakusa Kinship", in Radcliffe-Brown and Forde, op. cit., p. 112.

[89]C.O.2/24. No. 53, Captain William Allen to Lord Stanley, Feb. 5, 1843.

[90]Laird and Olfield, op. cit., I, pp. 381-2.

[91]P. C. Lloyd, "The Itsekiri in the Nineteenth Century, and outline Social History", Journal of African History, 4, 2 (1963), p. 217.

[92]Aboh, interview with Nos. 2, 5, 6, 8, and 19 in Appendix A, March, 1970. Also No. 7, 2, 3 at Lagos, Dec. 1969.

[93]Aboh, interview with Nos. 5, 8 in Appendix A, March 1970. Ndoni, interview with No. 13 in Appendix A. March 1970. Okpai, interview with No. 24 in Appendix A, April, 1970.

[94]Lander and Lander op. cit., 2, pp. 182-202.

[95]Ibid., p. 205-6.

[96]Ibid.

[97]Jones, The Trading States of the Oil Rivers, pp. 51-62, 162-176. 189-205.

[98]Aboh, interview with Nos. 2 and 5 in Appendix A, March, 1970.

[99]Lander and Lander, op. cit., 2, p. 183-4, 187.

[100]The Igbu title society is the highest honour society in Aboh, and although it is a private society, its social significance is such that its holders are in many cases looked upon as superior to the holders of traditional titles. For example, no one may become Obi or Iyasele who has not taken the Igbu title. Most holders of the higher public titles are Igbu society members.

The origins of the Igbu society is obscure, but it would seem to have originated from a need to honour the warriors who participated in the many inter-group wars. The word Igbu - "society of killers" is derived from Ogbu nmo i.e. "killer of human beings". In the past, anyone who killed his man in war was obliged to bring the head if he wished to be honoured. A hunter who succeeded in hunting down a lion, bull, gorilla etc. could also be honoured with an Igbu title. Today, initiation into the title society involved money payment, and lavish entertainment which might run up to something in the neighbourhood of £200.

The regulations are such that one could not take the Igbu title if his father or elder brothers. The alternative is having to pay the cost involved in buying the title for all those ahead of one, father and elder brothe rs.

[101]By contrast, Umuossai which has only one king to its credit has only four compounds. This becomes significant when it is realized that Obi Okeye according to tradition reigned very early in Aboh history. Again, Umuogwezi with only a king to its credit has four compounds. Both these sectors compare unfavourably with Umuojugbali and Umuozegbe each of which has produced five kings each. The former has eleven compounds while the latter has seven.

[102]Jones, op. cit., p. 172, 183.

[103]Allen and Thomson, op. cit., 1, pp. 235-6.

[104]Ibid.

[105]Baikie, op. cit., p. 303.

[106]Aboh, interview with No. 10 in Appendix A, March 1970.

[107]Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., 1, p. 100.

[108]See for example Nzimiro, op. cit., p. 85-90.

[109]There is some dispute over this. Some of the sectors make no distinction as to social status in electing its head. However there was an instance in which an old man of slave descent confessed to me that although he was legally entitled to the office, he was being pushed aside.

[110]A variant of this title is Ozizani. The Ozea is supposed to be the key figure in the funeral of the Obi.

[111]The Akpanuka is also said to be the Ugo spokesman of the entire umudei social class, particularly the title group during meetings at the palace.

[112]Nzenabi okiya is said to be the "personal friend" or confidant of the Obi and must be by the Obi's side when he offers sacrifice to his chi (guardian angel).

[113]The Ikogwe Aje is said to be the only one entitled to 'seize' kolanuts from the hands of the other title holders, hence his praise-name otafulu oji osa (one who eats everybody's kolanuts). The Ikogwe Aje does not appear to have any other 'real' functions, leading one to conclude that like other titles, this title is a characterization of an actual historical figure.

[114]Azaka Onukpala is also oga (divisor) for the umudei class.

[115]The Omodi or 'gentlemen' are traditionally restricted to sixteen.

[116]Okwa Ossai Ukwu are saluted mazi. They are four in number, one each from each of the four sectors. They are in reality not regarded as title holders but are entitled to meet with the title holders.

[117]Okwa umu - another four, one each from the sectors of Aboh who are entitled to sit with the titled men at the palace.

[118]The Onise Ogene is said to be the only man who may not kneel down to salute the Obi.

[119]The Ozoma Onyia is also a war minister.

[120]The Isagba Aje is said to be the Ugo or spokesman for the Ndichie class of titled men and also fulfills the important religious office of announcing when the sacrifice for chasing out evil spirits (ichu nmo) is performed.

[121]Aboh, interview with No. 5 in Appendix A, March 1970.

[122]Aboh, interview with No. 4, in Appendix A, March 1970.

[123]Crowther, Journal of an Expedition ...p. 189.

[124]Nzimiro, op. cit., p. 57.

[125]Ibid., pp. 59-60.

[126]All the functions discussed in this section has been drawn largely from an interview with No. 4 in Appendix A, March 1970.

[127]Aboh, interview with No. 4 in Appendix A, March 1970.

[128]The Isuosimili is a large piece of granite which rises above water level during the dry season, but is completely overflooded when the Niger rises. It is located in the middle of the Niger between Aboh and the village of Isala. The Aboh regard it as the "face of the sea" or the goddess. In the past, an albino was offered to the river goddess, but nowadays, cattle drapped up in white cloth is substituted. The Aboh believe that it protects them from attack.

[129]See Chapter VII.

[130]Forde and Jones, op. cit., p. 51.

[131]Allen and Thomson, op. cit., 1, p. 234.

[132]See also Nzimiro, op. cit., pp. 191-192.

[133]Aboh, interview with No. 4, in Appendix A, March 1970. Also, interview with No. 7, Lagos, Dec. 1969.

[134]Burdo, op. cit., p. 115.

[135]This was obviously the situation in the years following the death of Obi Ossai I in 1844. See Chapter VII.

[136]Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., 1, p. 388.

[137]Lander and Lander, op. cit., 2, p. 213.

[138]Ibid., p. 88.

[139]Allen and Thomson, op. cit., 1, p. 234.

[140]Burdo, op. cit., p. 115.

[141]Mattei A., Bas Niger, Benoue, Dahomey (Greenoble, 1890), p. 67.

CHAPTER FOUR

ORIGINS OF THE ABOH KINGDOM

Aboh traditions say that the founders of the kingdom emigrated from Benin following the death of Oba Ozolua. According to a very common version[1], one of the late Oba's sons named Essumei Ukwu[2] contended for the vacant Benin throne against the wishes of the king-makers. Essumei Ukwu was however advised by his mother to abandon the contest and flee the country, as she sensed that the prince and his supporters would lose in the armed conflict already brewing. A medicine woman of renown, she provided Essumei Ukwu with a bow and a set of charmed arrows (nkpishi),[3] an ite omumu - a medicine intended to bring about a rapid growth in population, - and a charmed dog, (nkita uku mali uzo). The duty of the dog was to seek out the arrows, and wherever the last arrow landed, was to be Essumei Ukwu's new kingdom. Along with his brothers, Ozoma, Osimili and Oputa, Essumei Ukwu left Benin.[4]

The expedition which included a large following, set out in a south-easterly direction. At Ogwuashi-Ukwu the princes turned west along the River Adofi, and made a first

stop-over at Ossissa. In the meanwhile the arrow shot just before the expedition set out had landed at Afor. When, however, the train got prepared to leave, Osimili decided to stay behind, and accordingly started a new settlement at Ossissa. The expedition set out, and succeeded in locating the first arrow at Afor, but Etim, one of the 'brother' princes, decided to found his own settlement at Afor. Before the others left, however, the medicinal pot (ite omumu) accidentally broke, resulting in a population explosion at Afor. The expedition was therefore constrained to depart without the medicine intended for use in their final destination. Another stop was made at Ashaka, from where a third arrow was shot, but as had been the experience until now, one of the leaders, this time prince Ozoma Ukwu, decided to remain at Ashaka.

Essumei Ukwu and Oputa were thus left to continue the search for the last of the charmed arrows. The arrow that had been shot at Ashaka touched down at Enu Oko, a short distance from Ashaka, but shortly before Oko was reached Oputa turned west to found the town of Ozoro. The last arrow shot at Enu Oko landed at Ugboko Ukwu (large forest), some four miles north-west of the present city of Aboh. The remnant of the emigrants from Benin under the leadership of Essumei Ukwu trailed the dog to the Ase Creek where it was found necessary to cross the river to the left bank. Whilst contemplating what to do, the Iwele, a people whose

home lay on the Ase, appeared on the scene, and offered to ferry the Aboh across. Away from the other members of the group, the Iwele repeatedly capsized the canoes on the signal gbami yoko which meant "let water into the canoe". The Aboh, who were as yet unused to water, drowned.

After several trips, Essumei Ukwu became apprehensive. He had been assured of the safety of his followers on the opposite bank, but no matter how hard he listened, he could not hear any sound from them. Essumei thereupon ordered the Iwele to stop ferrying his men, and himself, commenced sounding the edge of the river for anything that could assist them to get to the opposite bank. At one stage, he announced to his followers that he had struck a snag either side of which was lined by a swarm of tiny crayfish which the Aboh call igugu. On this, what was left of the group crossed the Ase river. Once on the safety of the left bank, the group was struck by a sudden splash, and almost immediately, one manatee (amei), after the other, surfaced to greet their bewildered gaze. It was only then that the people realized that they had crossed the river on the back of manatees which had linked themselves mouth to tail in order to assist the helpless Aboh. Overwhelmed with gratitude, Essumei produced a charm (ikpai) and swore by it, that as long as his descendants lived, none should kill or eat the manatee and crayfish.

Led by the dog, the Aboh commenced the trek along the Ofobo road to Ugboko Ukwu where the arrow had landed. The

journey took them through the villages of Edoagiriga which was inhabited by the Ibredeni and another Akarai village called Ugbene. At Ugboko Ukwu the dog stopped by the arrow, and here Essumei instructed his followers to clear sites for their new homes. To the south, lay the town of Aboh, inhabited by the Akarai people.

Once comfortably settled in their new home, the Aboh in co-operation with the Ashaka mounted an expedition against the Iwele, in revenge for the drowning of their men during the so-called gbami yoko incident. The Iwele villages were burnt and the population decimated. A few, who managed to escape, fled west to join the Isoko, while others later made their peace with Aboh and settled in their midst. The victorious Aboh sacked the Ibredeni village of Edoagiriga, and could have subjected Ugbene to the same fate, but for the intercession of Ozoma of Ashaka. Once his restraining influence left the scene, the Aboh attacked Ugbene and dispersed its inhabitants. One of the wives of the Ugbene chief succeeded in fleeing to Onitsha waterside where she gave birth to Ubediagana. The latter would avenge the destruction of his father's village in a series of contests with the Aboh.[5]

Aboh efforts to destroy the village of Ugbama were however repelled. Recourse was finally had to the famous Aro Chukwu oracle, and from this god, the Aboh received a charm the main ingredient of which was a bundle of

palm-fruit placed on a bamboo platform, (akpata) by the river side. The charm produced the desired effect. The Ugbama chief suddenly emigrated with his subjects to Umuolu where they constitute the sector of Ugbama.

Frightened by the proximity of such a warlike people, the Akarai invited the Ubu as the present Aboh were then called to a peace parley, where a treaty of friendship was to be concluded, (igide aka). Essumei Ukwu sent for Ozoma Ukwu, who came in from Ashaka, and advised that the Aboh sould go to the peace talks with their weapons concealed in a mat (ekiri), and draped with palm fronds to appear like a deity. On the appointed day, both sides assembled, and the host chief of the Akarai, after a long speech on the advantages on peaceful co-existence, produced the Akarai gods which were sworn to. When the turn of the Aboh came, they produced the concealed weapons, and upon the signal amonoto,[6] it was cut open, and each Aboh promptly picked up a matchet. A massacre ensued, in which the bewildered and unarmed Akarai were killed in large numbers. Many fled south to settle in Akaria Aboh, and Akarai Eti while others moved far nortn up the Niger river to Akarai Atani and Akarai Ogidi.

The Aboh abandoned their original settlement at Ugboko ukwu and promptly moved into the deserted city of Aboh. For sometime after, the Aboh sent tribute of choice fish

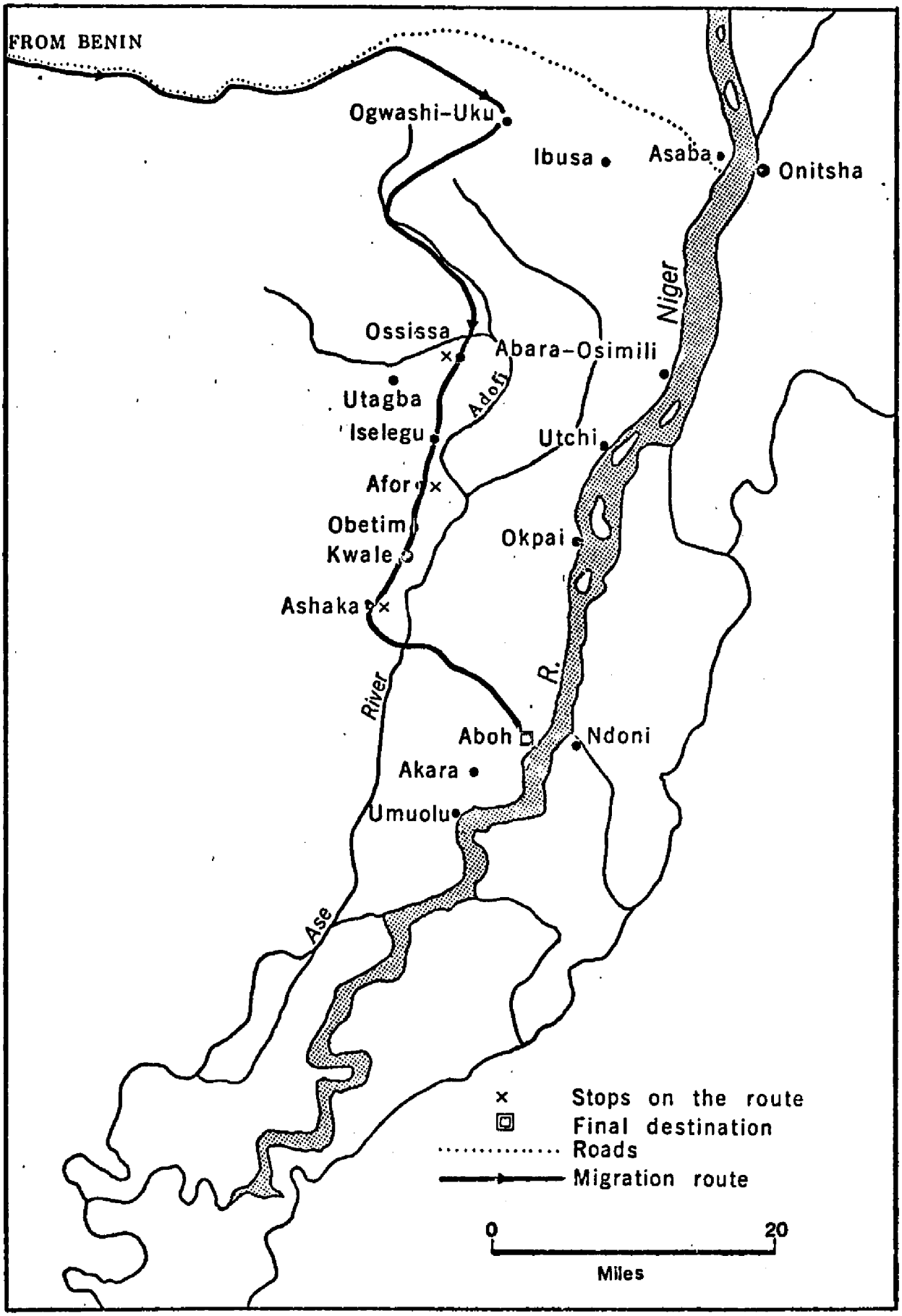


Fig. 11. The Migration from Benin

to Ozoma at Ashaka whom the traditions say was older than Essumei Ukwu. The fish was however always found to be decomposed after the long journey from Aboh. Ozoma therefore ordered Essumei to cease paying tribute to him and assume full sovereignty of his own settlement. The Aboh thereupon set Essumei up as Obi or king, and the kingdom of Aboh came into existence.

II

Aboh legends of origin may be subdivided into five major episodes viz: the flight from Benin, the stops at Ossissa, Afor and Ashaka; the crossing of the Ase; the initial settlement at Ugboko ukwu; and the expulsion of the Akarai from the city of Aboh. What aspects of the traditions, and which of these episodes represent facts of history are better reserved until evidence has been seived from a number of variants and sources.

If, as the traditions claim, the Aboh are an intrusive group, an analysis of the traditions may well begin with an attempt to identify the Aboh and determine the point of emigration. The traditions tell little beyond the fact that they were of Bini origin, and had left the kingdom under the leadership of a prince who had been involved in a succession dispute. It is curious however that the traditions refer to the emigrants as ubu (from which the name Aboh was

supposed to have been derived), and not simply Bini or Edo, by which names, the people of that ancient West African Kingdom were known, and are still called. It is of some interest to point out that in other cases where the people claim a Benin origin, the Itsekiri for example, it is the ruling dynasty alone which bears a name that can be traced historically to Benin. The group as a whole retains a non-Bini name, no doubt the name of the aborigines.

From various sources bearing directly on the history of Aboh, and evidence from other peoples of the midwest state and beyond[7], it seems certain that there was indeed a migration from the direction of Benin. All the versions of Aboh traditions corroborate on this point, besides evidence from traditions recorded earlier in the course of the nineteenth century.

As early as 1854, for example, William Baikie recorded that:

> the original inhabitants of Aboh were named A'kra and when driven away by the race who came from Ado [Benin] they went and settled in different directions, their towns being distinguished by the prefix A'kra to the previous name of the spot, thus we have A'kra Atani, A'kra Ugidi, and A'kra Uteri.[8]

In 1889, Captain A. F. Mockler-Ferryman who visited Aboh in the company of Major Claude Macdonald put down a version that is identical with current Aboh traditions.

> "According to tradition", wrote Mockler-Ferryman, "the town [of Aboh] ... belonged to the Akris, one of the numerous Ibo clans, the forefathers of the present possessors being natives of Idu [Benin].[9]

The most elaborate history of the Aboh and neighbouring peoples is contained in the intelligence report compiled by Mr. G. B. Williams in 1930.

> "Owing to the crowded state of Benin", wrote Mr. G. B. Williams, "five sons of the Oba Ozenwe [Ozolua?] left Benin under the leadership of Essume. They travelled East and when they reached the present site of Ossissa ... Ossumiri stopped and founded the villages of Ossissa. The remainder then proceeded south as far as the hamlet of Obodigbo where ... Etim settled close to Obodigbo and founded the village which is today Effor [Afor clan]. The rest of the contingent continued south and at Ashaka Ozomma and his followers stopped while Oputa turned west and founded Uzoro ... From Ashaka Essume continued his journey with the remainder of his followers until he reached the Niger ... where ... he met the people of Akrai who occupied the present site of Aboh."[10]

Another officer, Captain E. A. Miller, who covered much the same ground as Mr. Williams in 1931, claimed to have verified Mr. Williams' accounts, adding that "their confirmation is a matter of some importance".[11]

A Benin variant by Chief Jacob U. Egharevba confirms the claim of the Aboh.[12] According to this version, the name Aboh is derived from the Benin phrase n'oba bo, meaning the favourite of the king, by which the leader of the Aboh group was known. The emigration, claims Chief Egharevba, occurred during the reign of Oba Egbeka in the fourteenth century, at a time when civil wars led to large scale emigration from Benin. At Aboh, the Bini were later joined by large numbers of Igbo who in time became the dominant ethnic group. It might be added that Oba Egbeka's

reign (c.1370) also saw the emigration of the Urhobo to Abraka and the environs.[13] A version current at Ossomari, and recorded by a local historian, E. Kaine, affirms that the Aboh migrated to the Niger from Benin.

Although all available evidence lend some support to the Aboh claim to have come from the direction of Benin, evidence that they were Bini citizens in the narrowest definition of the term, is by no means conclusive. Were the Aboh citizens of Benin who had been forced by internal strife to emigrate, or had they a separate settlement of their own in the neighbourhood of Benin? Most traditions are rather vague on this point, and the tendency is to interpret emigration from 'Benin' literally. The position of the Aboh seem to be that they emigrated from within the confines of the city. Egharevba goes even further to assert that the leader of the Aboh was the "favourite of the King", implying by it, some nearness to the city and to the Benin royal house. It is remarkable though that Egharevba's phrase n'oba bo more closely resembles Aboh which the citizens claim was derived from the older form ubu. It seems obvious therefore that we can place little reliance on this piece of evidence. In all probability, n'oba bo is of recent origin, selectively phrased to resemble the more widely known Aboh, and therefore more strongly tie in with the traditions.

Perhaps more important evidence comes from a visit in 1924 of Obi Oputa of Aboh to Oba Akenzua II of Benin.[15] The latter alledgedly showed the Aboh King the 'quarter' from which the Aboh had emigrated. Although the impression given here was that the Aboh left from within the city and were therefore Bini in the narrowest meaning of the word, there is also the suggestion that the Aboh were a distinct group occupying a compact territory of their own. It is of some significance that this information emanated from the Benin royal house, but realizing the courtesy and the 'fatherly' air with which Benin monarchs treat the rulers of kingdoms which claim descent from Benin, it would be too much to place strict reliance on Oba Akenzua's evidence. The Aboh 'quarter' was in all probability a separate village in the neighbourhood of the city.

In point of fact, evidence from Onitsha confirms such a hypothesis. According to Arthur Leonard, who conducted research among the Onitsha in the 1890s, "Onitsha was one of the 'countries" over which the Oba of Benin ruled. One day, the story says, Asije the mother of the Oba at the time, had gone into one of the farms belonging to the Onitsha to gather sticks, for which "she was seized and beaten by the people to whom the farms belonged". The king upon hearing the insult ordered his brother Gbunmara to march against the Onitsha. A large army was mustered and Gbunmara "lost no time in invading the territory of Onitsha, the

king of which ... opposed him". After two days of fierce fighting king Tsima and his followers retreated towards the Niger, "but a small portion made their way southwards towards Abo".[16] Nnamdi Azikiwe in an article on Onitsha origins, also claims that prior to the seventeenth century, Onitsha was a subordinate district of the empire of Benin."[17]

Aboh traditions, it must be stressed confirm the essential unity of the movement which resulted in the establishment of the kingdoms of Onitsha and Aboh. A version recorded by Obi Oputa about 1948 mentioned the town of Onitsha, as founded by one of the emigrants from Benin and companion of Essumei ukwu.[18] Traditions from Ashaka affirm that Chima of Onitsha was among those who left Benin along with Essumei, Oputa, Osumili, Ozoma, and Etim,[19] while Ossissa accounts specifically mentions the heroic defence of their settlement by Chima, who later 'disappeared'.[20]

Drawing on the traditions of the Aboh and neighbouring peoples, as well as the Onitsha traditions, the Reverend Hubbard asserted that the Aboh and Onitsha may have been descendants of "people who came to Benin from Arochukwu as agents of the Long-juju". The 'colony' they established, near Benin soon lost the Igbo language as the Edo language and culture increasingly took root among the Igbo settlers. Following the disturbance which occurred during the reign of Oba Esigie, the Onitsha people fled eastwards under the leadership of one Ezechima to Onitsha. However, Hubbard

goes on,

> another section of the Onitsha, instead of crossing the Niger with Ezechima, struck southwards, following more or less the course of the Ase River ... led by a man called Ogwezi who had the title Obi. The Obi Ogwezi led his people through the jungle ..[and] eventually reached Aboh where Ogwezi founded his kingdom.[21]

There has been a considerable debate as to the location of the Aboh-Onitsha settlement. Leonard claims that it was located to the west of Benin,[22] while Nnamdi Azikiwe merely asserts that it was a district subordinated to Benin. P. A. Talbot has advanced the hypothesis that the settlement in question lay east of Benin and probably formed part of the fief of the Queen mother. Although conclusion cannot be drawn one way or the other, there is little doubt that the Aboh-Onitsha 'quarter' or settlement was outside Benin 'proper' and probably subject to the political control of the Oba of Benin. It might even be suggested that the Onitsha-Aboh settlements constituted the western vanguard of the Igbo-speaking peoples who were forced to flee further eastwards after losing in one of the early wars of expansion engaged in by the growing Benin Empire. In this regard, it is perhaps no coincidence that Benin traditions relate the expansion into Igbo country to the late fifteenth century and after.[23]

If this premise is accepted, it would appear that the Aboh claim that Essumei ukwu was a Benin prince is open to serious doubt. It seems odd that Chief Egharevba who

described the leader of the Aboh as the king's 'favourite' should omit the fact that he was also a prince, although such a notion can be inferred. In point of fact Chief Egharevba ascribes the coming of a Benin prince to Aboh to a later date.

It is of some interest to note that none of those who recorded Aboh traditions in the 1850s and 1880s noted the fact that Aboh was founded by a Benin prince. It seems curious that the Aboh chose to be silent over the issue in the past, while making it, generations later, the central theme of the traditions. On the other hand, that aspect of the traditions may have been considered a matter of detail which no one bothered to go into. It must however be stressed that every group who claim a Benin origin tie this to the Benin royal house. There is therefore nothing unique in the Aboh traditions. For example, the Urhobo and Itsekiri who claim descent from Benin claim that the founders of their respective kingdoms were princes. Nearer Aboh, the account of Mr. G. B. Williams already referred to show that the people of Ossissa, Afor and Ashaka make similar claims. Their ancestral founders were all 'princes', and sons of Oba Ozolua. A considerable confusion exist here though. For example, a variant of the Ossissa tradition claims that Etim, Ozoma and Essumei were the sons, not brothers of Ossimili. Besides, there is little agreement among the prince 'brothers' as to who was older. Thus, the Afor people claim that Etim was the eldest, and that the <u>ofo ukwu</u>

(senior ofo) is to this day in Afor. The people of Ashaka however claim that Ozoma was the eldest, and the Aboh confirm this tradition.

A comparison of the Onitsha and Aboh traditions reveal some weaknesses in the Aboh cliam. While the Onitsha claim to have emigrated from Benin, no where in the traditions is mention made of a royal ancestry. Perhaps the question might be more easily resolved by tieing it to the issue of the emigration. Why, did the Aboh leave Benin or a region very near it? The variant of Aboh tradition recorded in the first part of this chapter claims that the princes left Benin with the sole objective of establishing a kingdom over which Essumei ukwu might reign. The tradition is however silent over the question why Essumei ukwu did not establish this kingdom in one of the earlier stops, preferring to come to Aboh, and deserted in the process by his 'brothers'. The version by Obi Oputa merely asserts that the Aboh was part of a multitude who had left Benin "aiming to rule the world". Another variant says that the Aboh emigrated from Benin on account of incessant civil wars which had rendered life very difficult.[24] Thus, the development of a separate kingdom in Aboh was purely incidental to the main purpose of the emigration.

Some more insights into this problem may be gained by comparing present day traditions to those recorded

earlier. Writing as early as 1889, Mockler-Ferryman claimed that the Aboh had

> revolted against their Chiefs at Idu, and having been driven from their native town, betook themselves to the neighbourhood of Aboh.[25]

This piece of evidence parallels Onitsha tradition of a war with Gbunwara during Oba Esigie's reign. The Chiefs of Ossissa, one of the clans said to have been established by the same wave of emigration as the Aboh, told Captain Miller in 1930 that their forefathers "ran away from Benin during Ojebalani wars", i.e. war of all nations. In the course of the flight, they had made camp at Umodia (near the umuosimili sector of the town of Ossissa). A Benin warrior named Ogwara (Gbunwara?) chased them to Ossissa, but they were saved by the intervention of Chima (of Onitsha?). It was only after this contest that Essumei, Oputa, Etim and Ozoma branched out to found the settlements now associated with their names. Chima himself disappeared, and was never heard of again.[26]

The Ossissa ojebelani must have been a large scale civil disturbance, and the mention of the name of the Benin warrior Gbunwara certainly ties them with the disturbance which forced the Onitsha to flee. Again, Ashaka traditions deny the Aboh claim that the emigrants had set out to establish a kingdom. The exodus, it says, sprang from a civil war which ravaged Benin in the reign of Oba Esigie.[27] It is curious therefore that Aboh, the only town where the

institution of kingship developed should have a variant which talks of emigration in terms of founding a kingdom.

The consensus of the evidence thus far polled is that the movement was involuntary, and part of a general unrest in Benin. Benin tradition records several civil wars in the reigns of the earlier Oba. It is decidedly difficult to identify a particular case. However, Benin traditions tell of a great civil war in which Oruaran, Chief of Udo, "a man of giant stature", locked horns with Oba Esigie. "Many battles", wrote Egharevba, "were fought, sometimes one side being victorious, and sometimes, the other", the fiercest battle of which was known as okuo ukpoba (Battle of Blood).[28] It is significant that the rituals of the installation of the Obi of Onitsha include a retreat at a place called Udo, and that the name of the warrior in the Onitsha and Ossissa traditions - Gbunwara and Ogwara - should bear some resemblance to the Udo Chief Aruaran. But even if we are unable to establish that this was the civil war that led to the exodus of the Onitsha, Aboh and neighbouring peoples, it is still difficult to fit the Aboh claim to royal Benin descent into the evidence at our disposal.

The issue is further complicated by the rather prestigious testimony of the late Oba Eweka II (1914-1933). Said Oba Eweka:

> The Obi of Abo entered relationship with the Oba of Benin since long time ago; he was a son of Ozolua one of the Oba's of Benin and was sent to Aboh to be the paramount ruler over all the Kwale-Ibo.[29]

How valid the Oba's testimony is constitutes a difficult problem. Born in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Oba was much nearer the original source of Benin traditions, and was said to have contributed immensely to Chief Egharevba's History of Benin. The Oba's testimony quoted above appeared several years before Egharevba published his history, and had been volunteered in response to questions regarding the status of the Obi of Aboh. But while the Oba's evidence deserves to be taken seriously, it seems strange that nothing was said about the status of the 'princes' of Ossissa,[30] Afor, Uzoro, and Ashaka, where no kingdoms developed. On the other hand, the Oba was not bound to supply information to questions not asked. Even if the Oba's evidence was taken at face value, it still does not confirm the Aboh tradition that "five princes" all sons of Oba Ozolua set out in one direction, with only one succeeding in building a kingdom. Indeed, it would be very unusual for that many 'princes' to set out in one expedition.

The operational word in Oba Eweka's testimony would appear to be 'sent' implying that the arrival of a prince of the Benin royal house at Aboh was an event that occurred after a polity of some sort had been established. Chief Egharevba's version of traditions relating to the founding of Aboh lends some support to such a hypothesis. According to the Chief, the Igbo and the fourteenth century Bini emigrants to Aboh had established a political system in which

authority (presumably kingship) rotated between the two groups. A dispute however arose and the Bini segment sent to Oba Ozolua for help. The Benin monarch promptly responded with an expedition which succeeded in bringing Aboh under Benin control. As part of the process of consolidation, Oba Ozolua sent his son Ogbeze to rule in Aboh. The name Ogbeze was over the years corrupted to Ogwezi.

Aboh traditions may therefore be viewed as the consequences of a telescoping process in which two distinct events - the initial settlement of Aboh by Bini emigrants as early as the reign of Oba Egbeka or even later, and the later arrival of a Benin army and prince to rule over the conquered territory. It could be that the Aboh tradition of war with the Akarai to be discussed shortly, disguise the Bini conquest of Aboh, but this is conjectural.

The tentative settlement of these questions, does not dispose of problems connected with the episode of the flight from Benin. Three stops were said to have been made by the fleeing princes - at Ossissa, Afor and Ashaka - before Aboh was reached. Traditions collected from all three towns confirm the Aboh story, but there is neither evidence that all the leaders connected with the emigration were actually 'brothers', nor is there indication as to the duration of each stop. The issue of the "prince brothers" may easily be resolved by assuming that 'brother' has been used in these traditions in its widely classificatory sense, and

that the leaders of the emigrating party may be designated as 'co-evals'.

It appears interesting that with the exception of the stop at Ossissa, an arrow shot determined where the expedition was to stop.[31] There are two interrelated hypotheses for this phenomenon. Firstly, the arrow shots grant some legitimacy to the entire expedition. It shields rather excellently the undignified impression which would otherwise gain currency that "five princes" set out from Benin with no indication where they were going. Secondly, every stop acquires 'membership' in the body of traditions, as well as legitimacy. They were all pre-determined by the super-natural represented in the arrows and charmed dog. Again the cliche would appear to be a fairly legitimate explanation of why it was necessary to get into Aboh, the promised land chosen by the last arrow.

Aboh traditions also assert that the medicine pot (ite omumu) broke accidentally at Afor, and was therefore the reason why Afor has a large population. Afor population today about equals that of Ashaka and Ossissa, and actually trails Aboh by some two thousand,[32] but Afor must have had a large concentration of population in the past. It is this large population that the ite omumu incident seeks to explain. The incident probably also veils the possibility that the stop at Afor was particularly long, and during this prolonged stay, reproduction occurred on a large scale.

For the Aboh, the most important episode in the journey from Benin is the crossing of the Ase River. If, as the tradition claims, the Aboh came in from the direction of Benin along the route already outlined, emigrants must have crossed the Ase, but to have done so on the backs of manatees is another matter. The incident at the creek is complicated by the existence today in Aboh of a discrete Iwele group, all of whom are confined to the sector of Umuossai. Members of this group belong to the ndichie social class, and refer to themselves with some pride as nde gbami yoko i.e. "we are the gbami yoko people". It is also pertinent to add that the Aboh regard the Iwele in their midst with some suspicion. Intermarriage is not widespread, and relations cannot be said to be on the most cordial level.[33] The Iwele have, for example, entered into Aboh parables as 'tricksters', and one not infrequently hears an Aboh say that someone is as sly as the Iwele. People say: "ba gbam igbanaki umu Iwele i.e. Do not trick me as the Iwele did".

But even if gbami yoko can be established as a historical event, it is still difficult to conceive of how the phrase reached the Aboh, if those in the canoes perished. In any event, the Ase is a narrow creek, and unless the Iwele pulled the canoes very far south from the point of embarkation, the Aboh would have heard the scuffles of drawning men, and so put a stop to the homicidal intent of

the Iwele before it reached the scale attested by the traditions.

Whether or not this or a similar incident occurred on the Ase would in the final analysis depend on proof as to the Iwele home at the time. Close by the Ase River is a tall ogilisi tree, which the Aboh, the Ashaka, and neighbouring Oko and Isoko peoples refer to as ogilisi umu Iwele, i.e. "the ogilisi tree of the Iwele people". It is a matter of interest that the Iwele agree that their villages were originally located in the area. For the people of the neighbourhood, it is like one of the cardinal points, a marker of direction, and it would appear significant that knowledge of such a place-name should be so widespread. The best that can be said under the circumstances is that the Aboh and Iwele did meet on the Ase, and that the latter attempted to block the progress of the Aboh eastwards. What form such a resistance took can only be speculated upon but the Aboh probably coined the phrase gbami yoko, to explain their first unsuccessful encounter with the Iwele.

The 'bridge' of manatees and crayfish is the most sensitive aspect of Aboh traditions, and one that has a far reaching implication for Aboh religion. In times past, the manatee was not mentioned by its name amei. The Aboh preferred (and still prefer) such terms of reverence as anunso umudei, i.e. "animal that is taboo to the princes", or di wenyi, i.e. "he who owns us" - The Aboh do not kill, neither do

they eat the manatee, and reverence for it is carried to such degrees that an Aboh who saw one killed or exposed for sale was obliged to ransom it and accord it a dignified burial. Any one who shirked his or her responsibility was believed to be speedily afflicted by all forms of dreadful diseases and might die unless the gods were propitiated at the Ngulu shrine.[34]

The Aboh explain this supernatural feat by saying: wa kowa pu ife meni ni oge gbo i.e. "no one is capable of explaining what happened during the time of our ancestors". Be that is it may, it seems incredible that a reputedly large group crossed a stream on the backs of interlocking manatees without knowledge of the fact. The Ase is both narrow and shallow, and was certainly more so in the remote past when this incident allegedly occurred. The Aboh could therefore have waded across, or actually crossed on a snag,[35] and later spurned the "manatee bridge" into the traditions to explain the reverence accorded the manatee as a totem of the clan. The inclusion of the manatee legend at this stage of the tradition would even be most logical perhaps because a manatee or manatees surfaced after the Aboh had crossed. Perhaps, the first time of their seeing a manatee, they naturally attributed their safety to the animal, and provided it with a fitting position in their pantheon. One of the weaknesses of the Aboh claim is the fact that they regard most reptiles as taboo. Thus, crocodiles and alligators, are regarded as nne enyi i.e. "our mother".

Myth begins to merge with history as we enter the final episodes in the traditions. Reference has already been made to the Aboh claim to have initially settled at Ugboko ukwu, and in this regard, the annual re-enactment ceremonies would appear to lend some support to the traditions. The powerful ritual link with such a relatively distant and secluded spot, would be difficult to explain were there no tie of some historical significance.[36]

Evidence recorded earlier in the nineteenth century, bear out the claim that the present city of Aboh originally belonged to the Akarai people. Attention has been drawn to the account given by Dr. W. B. Baikie in 1854, to the effect that Aboh previously belonged to the Akarai who were later conquered and dispersed by the "race who came from Ado".[37] Thirty five years after Baikie, Mockler Ferryman set down a detailed account of the Aboh-Akarai war which parallels both earlier and later traditions. The Aboh, wrote Mockler Ferryman

> were well received by the Akris, and given a portion of land whereon to build a town on the understanding that they should give assistance to their friends if called upon to do so. The refugees became jealous of the power of the Akris and determined to make an attempt to get the upper hand. They asked the chiefs and youngmen of the Akris to meet them at a certain spot in the bush, at night for the purpose of ... settling some important affairs of state. The Akris, unsuspecting treachery agreed, but stipulated that no weapons should be taken by anyone, mats and fans being the only things allowed. At the appointed time, the clans met, each Idu [Aboh] having carefully concealed in his mat, a well sharpened matchet. The Idus opened

> the discussion by demanding that one of their members should be appointed king of themselves and of the Akris, to which of course the latter objected. This was the signal for the Idus to draw their matchets and fall on their former friends, more than 800 of whom they slaughtered on the spot. The Akris were obliged to abandon their town and become scattered about the country, paying a yearly tribute of smoked fish to the new king of Aboh.[38]

Interviewing a later generation of Akri people in 1929, Mr. Williams was informed that the Aboh had settled 'beside' them, but that some misunderstanding arose which both groups agreed to refer to a joint meeting in which no one was to appear armed.

> The people of Akrai adhered to the agreement, but the Aboh came with matchets concealed in their clothing. Speeches were made by the spokesmen of the two sides, and then at a given signal the Abohs drew their matchets and attacked the Akrais. There was very heavy slaughter and the Akrai fled.

Two of the Akrai wards went up the River Niger to settle at Akrai Ogidi and Akarai Atani. The Obago and Ogboso wards emigrated to Ogume, and Abeddei respectively. The Igbwetti and Etti quarters returned after sometime and

> humbled themselves before the Obi who then allowed them to settle on the present site of Akarai Aboh and Akarai Etti. In return for being allowed to settle there, they were made to serve as hunters to the Obi and supply him with meat when he required it.[39]

Some solid evidence corroborate these traditions. Firstly, it is significant that the Akarai affirm the traditions which should have been in the interest of their 'national' history to repudiate. Secondly, the Akarai are one of the few Igbo-speaking peoples with widely scattered

and yet common villages. Akarai Atani and Akarai Ogidi lay on the Niger south of Onitsha while the other settlements lay about five miles south of Aboh.

It is also significant that until the present decade, the centre from which the Akarai were believed to have fled to the other sites was known as Akarai-Aboh. It has now been renamed Akarai Obodo. Fourthly, it is forbidden to this day to carry into Akarai Obodo a parcel wrapped in matting and tied up at both ends. The ends must be open and the contents exposed. There exist some uncertainty as to what actually transpired in this respect. Some accounts say that each Aboh hid his own matchet, while other accounts say they were tied together. The latter seem to have been the case.

Aboh religious exercises lend support to the tradition that the Akarai originally owned the town. For example, people of Akarai origin have continued to be respected as a privileged class and 'owners of the land". Essama Kaine, the Ossomari historian noted that the Akarai who elected to remain in Aboh have been chosen as priests of the earth and water deities.[40] Whenever the Aboh swear by the earth, which they do fairly often, they are heard to say: ani Aboh, ani Akarai i.e. "earth of Aboh, earth of Akarai". In any sacrifice to the earth deity - isu ani,- it is mandatory to obtain the services of an Akarai as joint priest, and no sacrifice is deemed complete until both sides are represented.

Aboh traditions tend to be silent or vague on the issue of their status vis a vis the Akarai. Some make no mention of status, contending themselves with the statement that the Aboh lived at Ugboko ukwu and later drove the Akarai. One version however gives the indication that the Aboh originally settled at Ugboko ukwu as vassals of the Akarai, and were expected to deliver produce - yams etc. to their Akarai overlords.[41] One Akarai version actually asserts that the Aboh were allowed to settle in Akarai land as their 'slaves'. It would appear safe to conclude then that the Aboh were initially in a position of vassalage to the Akarai, but later rebelled, and overthrew their masters.

Some obvious conclusions may be drawn from the evidence polled above. It is necessary however to record some variants of the traditions relative to the founding of Aboh. A version of the Akarai traditions makes an interesting comparison with other accounts. According to this version, the Akarai had offered the Aboh territory to occupy as their 'slaves', (vassals or dependents). At the same time, however, the Akarai emigrated from their settlement at Aboh further south to Akarai Obodo (formerly Akarai Aboh). After some time, the Aboh invited the Akarai to participate in a sacrifice to the earth goddess. Contrary to usage, the Aboh concealed weapons in an egbo (parcel wrapped in a mat), and without any provocation commenced to attack their guests

and landlords. A large number of Akarai managed to escape to their home at Akarai Obodo, and later carried out a sanguinary revenge on the Aboh. The Aboh, who were decisively beaten in this encounter, however resorted to the use of charms. This preparation was placed on a palm-tree, and as the palm-nuts ripened and fell to the ground, an equal number of Akarai notables died. It was to escape the influence of this powerful charm that some Akarai emigrated to Akarai Atani, Akarai Ogidi and Akarai Eti.[42]

There are some basic inconsistencies in this version. Firstly, it contrasts sharply with the traditions of the Akarai people recorded earlier in the century. It also fails to agree with a version collected by the Reverend J. Hubbard about 1948 which confirms earlier assertions that the Akarai originally owned and lived in Aboh until they were "dispossessed and dispersed" by the Aboh.[43] Secondly, it concedes that the Akarai left their town for the immigrant Aboh, insisting however that it was voluntary. It appears doubtful however that a people would leave their homes for other immigrants without any strong reason, only to be scattered over a wide area. Thirdly, the Aboh, as 'slaves' or vassals of the land owning Akarai could not have invited their 'overlords' to a sacrifice to the earth goddess. Among the Igbo, the earth deity is worshipped only by those who own the land, and not by aliens. This version is therefore of recent origin and the reference

to the use of 'juju' by the Aboh is intended to mask an actual encounter in which the Akarai lost to the Aboh, and consequently fled the country.

Another version collected by J. S. Boston at Igala contradicts the traditions of the Aboh people. According to this variant, "Aboh was founded in a migration of families from Idah". The kings of Aboh, it goes on, were also subjects of the Ata Igala, and

> each new chief of Aboh had to spend three months at Idah before investiture, performing rituals and receiving instructions from the king's eunuchs.[44]

The Igala, it must be recounted, possess traditions laying claim to many of the riverain Igbo towns. Attention has already been drawn to this, and it could be that these traditions refer to pre-Bini migrations into Aboh. However, these Igala traditions are not corroborated by evidence from some of these settlements. Boston himself concedes that the claim could not by itself support the Igala origin of Aboh in the absence of corroborative evidence. In this case it is lacking. If, as this variant claims, the office of Obi was ritually tied to Igala, traces of this ought, at least, to have been retained in the Aboh rituals of kingship. Besides, an earlier Igala tradition told to the Reverend Crowther, by the highly placed Galadima of Igala in 1854 affirmed that the kings of Aboh and Igala came from Benin.[45]

It appears safe to conclude therefore that the Aboh left a settlement near Benin in the same movement which led

to the founding of Onitsha. The emigration was probably triggered by the widespread civil disorder during the reign of Oba Esigie, or somewhere in the late fifteenth to the mid-sixteenth century. A major breach occurred in the movement, which may have extended over a long period, before the Niger River was reached. One group, under Chima, crossed the river to settle Onitsha, while the other group took a more westerly route, stopping at Ossissa, Afor and Ashaka, and finally crossing the Ase creek to Aboh. Here a settlement was founded near an older Igbo population. The ubu, as the new comers were then called, may have started out as dependents of the Akarai Igbo owners of the country, but they later rebelled, and conquered their overlords. Some Akarai remained to form the earliers group of ndichie, but people from the surrounding country immigrated in large numbers to join the Aboh in their new home. The ubu lost much of their original language during the course of the journey from Benin. In Aboh however what remained was swamped by the dominant Igbo language, which was widely spoken between the apex of the Niger Delta and Igala in the north. Elements of Benin culture however survived in personal names, folklore, and chieftaincy system, but the resulting culture was largely a synthesis of Benin and Igbo.

III

Archaeology, anthropology and linguistics are disciplines from which resources can be drawn in relation to oral traditions.[46] Unfortunately, archaeology and linguistics have little to contribute as yet, and what anthropological data we have represent only the surface of a vast field. We do however possess enough evidence to suggest that Aboh-Bini relations could have been one of two things: either the Aboh people have been in a long and unbroken contact with Benin or there actually was a migration of poeple from Benin into a predominantly Igbo territory.

The relatively simple but crucial field of folk-tales is a case in point. All Aboh tales are prefaced: aduwu aduwu n'obodo idu n'oba i.e. "once upon a time when we lived in the Oba's kingdom of Benin". The principal characters in a majority of the tales are the Oba of Benin and the proverbial wise tortoise. Each fable is intended to demonstrate the tremendous power, wealth and wisdom of the Oba. Benin fables, it should be noted, are characterized by identical plots and figures. East of the Niger however, tales do not begin with the kind of preface we find among the Aboh, neither are there similarities in themes, and characters. There is, for example, a notable absence of Benin and the Oba in east Igbo stories.[47] A more thorough investigation of this category of evidence would be of great

help, but the existence of a culture feature, the boundaries of which coincide with those of oral history, argues strongly for a long contact between Aboh and Benin.

The occurrence in Aboh of certain proper names whose meanings are no longer known to the people is significant evidence. The importance of these names assumes greater proportions when it is observed that they were in the past largely restricted to the umudei class, and have been perpetuated by the ima agwu ritual which gives certain names the character of lineage property. Amongst the most common of these old names are Essumei, Ozegbe, Ajie, Ogwezi Olise, Okeye, Ugboma, Idu, Oputa, Ojugbali, Ijoma, and Uti. Some of these names, for example Ozegbe, Osakwe, and Ugboma, are also borne by the Bini. Idu, the most popular female name actually means Edo or Bini. It is remarkable that these names are almost completely absent in Igbo country east of the Niger.[48] Further, Aboh genealogies reveal a preponderance of these unique names at the upper levels, and the total absence of names typical of Igbo country.

Attention has in recent times been drawn to the marked socio-political disparity between the east and western Igbo. East of the Niger, except for such riverain kingdoms as Onitsha and Ossomari, society is characterized by segmentary lineages in semi-autonomous villages. Government at this level is what Uchendu has characterized as "direct democracy".

It involves all the lineages and requires the participation of all the male adults.[49] The closest we approach to any centralized authority is the holder of the ofo ozuzu. This instrument is kept by the head of the senior kindred, but he is principally a priest, and his functions mark him apart as the embodiment of the moral order. The ofo does not confer any role of practical leadership. As G. T. Basden observed,

> the ofo holder is frequently poor and insignificant, and no more respect is paid to him as a man, than he can command by his own personality. The only time honour is shown him is when he is performing an act of sacrifice; then it is the office that is respected, not the man.[50]

There are of course ofo holders in Aboh and among other right bank Igbo, but in places like Agbor, Iselle Ukwu, Onitsha, and Ossomari there are offices higher than those of the ofo ozuzu custodians, and whose political and ritual powers are unquestionably supreme. The Igbo on the left bank are also characterized by the absence of ruling house, a phenomenon so graphically attested by the maxim: ndi igbo echi eze, meaning "the Igbo make no kings."[51] It seems not unreasonable to conclude, that Igbo country west of the Niger early received Bini elements who built the institution of kingship into which was incorporated the Igbo concept of the ofo symbol. It could also be the result of a more intensive exposure to, and contact with, the Bini.

The fact however that Igbo in long contact with the Onitsha and Aboh have failed to develop the institution

of kingship indicates the presence of a factor far more fundamental than mere culture contact. For example, the Ukwuani, to the north west of Aboh and nearer Benin, possess a social structure very similar to the rest of Igbo country east of the Niger. Benin tradition of conquest and political domination of the west bank Igbo which authorities now date to the fifteenth century opens up the greater likelihood of immigration.[52]

A loose but interesting piece of evidence suggests Benin domination of Aboh at a relatively early date. A map drawn in September 1882 by Archdeacon Crowther, has inscribed on it the following: "Route to Aboh (years gone by, delegates are usually sent from Benin proper to crown Aboh kings by this route)". Unfortunately, Crowther's statement is not corroborated by oral data from Aboh, but there can be little doubt that he was supplied this information by the people in 1882.[53] A common tradition among west bank Igbo kingdoms is that their respective obi used to go to Benin to receive the blessings of the Oba of Benin. The late Oba Eweka II asserted that Aboh kings were in the past confirmed by the Oba of Benin.[54] Although, knowledge of the exact nature of Aboh-Benin relations is far from perfect, Michael Crowder's summary of the available data appears valid enough.

> "An examination of the form of monarchy of these states", wrote Crowder, "suggests close relationship with Benin which could have come about through migration, culture contact or through the installation of a ruling class from Benin."[55]

A systematic study of what art there is in Aboh is yet to be undertaken. Until the spade of the archaeologist reveals finds of a spectacular nature, we will have to be content with the observations of lay, but early European visitors to Aboh. It might be noted though, that a great deal of what early visitors found are no longer to be seen, neither is there a surviving guild of artists in Aboh. The meager evidence at our disposal however indicate some similarities with Benin art and culture.

The regalia of the Obi of Aboh described for us by the Lander brothers deserves some attention. The Obi at the time the Landers reached Aboh was Ossai I, and his dress, according to the explorers, "somewhat resembles that which is worn on state occasions by the monarch of Yarriba".[55] They were particularly struck by the vast quantity of coral beads which the Obi had on, noting humorously that the "Obie might not inappropriately be styled the coral King". The Obi's crown was

> covered thickly with strings of coral ... his neck was encircled with several strings of the same kind of bead ... fastened so tightly as in some degree to affect his respiration and to give his throat and cheeks an inflated appearance. In opposition to these were four or five others hanging round his neck and reaching to his knees .. thirteen or fourteen bracelets decorated each wrist ... the lower part of [his legs] being similarly ornamented like the wrists with precisely the same number of strings of beads.[57]

Beads formed the most important part of the trappings of persons of rank among the Yoruba and Bini. By contrast,

they are remarkably absent in Igbo country east of the Niger. The Oba of Benin's full ceremonial robe, as well as the crown, are woven with coral beads, and the same could be said for the kings of Warri, Agbor, and Iselle-Uku. The description given by the Landers indicate that the Aboh monarch was no exception. In point of fact, in the 1920s when the status of the Obi of Aboh came up for discussion in connection with the reorganization of local government, Oba Eweka II of Benin had been asked if the Obi of Aboh was entitled to wear a beaded crown. The Benin monarch responded that the Obi was descended from the Benin royal house, and was entitled to wear a crown of beads.[58] It is significant that the Landers found this parallel with the Alafin of Oyo whom they had seen on their way to Bussa by land. As there exist no evidence of Aboh contact with Yoruba, the only avenue through which the bead complex could have reached Aboh is Benin.

The Landers were not alone in noting this similarity. R. A. K. Oldfield who visited Aboh in 1832 observed that from Obi Ossai's "fondness for coral ornaments, I should imagine him to be of Benin extraction".[59] Its profuse use by the dominant organ of government is suggestive of an innovating immigrant group, or at the very least, an extended period of contact during which both the substance and outward form of the monarchical institution was copied by the Aboh.

The Landers were also attracted by certain objects of art in the palace of Obi Ossai. They noted that these were intensely similar to those they had seen in Oyo. The pillars which supported the roof of the verandah of the palace had

> a great number of images carved upon them, very much after the manner of the Yarriba ... indeed, the difference between the productions of both countries, in this branch of art, is scarcely, if at all to be perceived.[60]

Benin-Yoruba art is one of the most studied subjects, and experts are generally of the opinion that they are closely related.[61] While evidence is as yet too thin, it seems likely that Aboh art, based on the description provided by the Landers and R. A. K. Oldfield, indicate contact with or influence from, Benin. With the exception of the Igbo ukwu finds, which indicate a tradition similar to the Benin-Ife art, it is of some interest to note that the generality of the highly stylized masks of the left bank Igbo, contrast sharply with what is known of Yoruba and Benin bronze and wood sculpture.[62]

There are no brass-smiths in Aboh today, and only a few of my informants retain any knowledge of the tradition of brass-casting in Aboh. In the nineteenth century, such fine craftsmen existed. Unfortunately, none of their works have so far been discovered. The only evidence is the ofo, an intricately ornamented ancestral symbol cast in bronze

and very highly regarded by the Aboh. Baikie recalls having seen brass objects at Aboh, some of which he bought as specimen of the craft of Aboh.[63] The great gap in our knowledge in this field does not permit of any hypothesis. For example, the brass smiths may have come from Nupe, a people with whom the Aboh had trade relations through the Igala. On the other hand, brass casting in Aboh may have been the result of contact with Benin. Obi Ossai I reported that it took four days to reach Benin from Aboh, and the indication is that communication was widespread.

IV

Thus far, all direct reference to time has been deliberately avoided, in order to focus more on the problems connected with the origins of Aboh. In the following section, an attempt will be made to place the migration, and the founding of the Aboh Kingdom in a proper time perspective. The problems involved in fitting the relative time perspective inherent in oral traditions into an absolute time scale has in recent times received much attention.[64] The literature need not be reviewed here.

Time scale in Aboh, as in all pre-literate societies, is conceived in relative terms. In this regard, the Aboh have drawn heavily upon re-occurring natural phenomena and important social events. The Aboh word for 'month' is <u>onwa</u>,

a term by which the moon is also identified. Months are calculated by reference to the phases of the moon. The appearance of the new moon-onwa ofu, is celebrated as the beginning of a new month-onwa ofu. The fixing of dates for rituals and festivals also follow the phases of the moon.[65]

The Aboh also delimit time in 'seasons' based on the annual flood of the River Niger. When the river overflows its bank, it is iju or wet season, and when the water recedes, it is okochi or dry season. However, no attempt is made to fit either the lunar month or the seasons into a continuous time scale. Each method of assessing time is largely independent of the other. The Aboh 'year' - aswa - is determined by the flood, but it is counted in multiples of three. For the Aboh, every two floods of the Niger counts as three years, although this would ordinarily amount to two wet seasons, with one dry season between (approximately twenty calendar months).

As long then as every event is identified with the proper 'time', the months, seasons and years come and go. They are not perceived as continuous and cummulative. For example, an important event may be linked with an excessive flooding, but this amounts to little on an absolute scale for the time before and after this event is not accounted for.

Again, the recurring phenomena of birth and death are utilized by many as indices of time. Thus an Aboh might be heard to say that he was born when X died, or that his son and Y's daughter are ofu ishi otu i.e. born within two floods or three years of one another. This method is however of minimal use for no one knows, on an absolute scale, when X died or when Y's daughter was born.

An otherwise useful conception of the past is the "dynastic-time". The Aboh rely very much on this technique. In point of fact, time for the Aboh is so inextricably interwoven with one king or the other, that almost nothing is remembered of the times when no kings reigned. Major events-births, deaths, wars, and trade were associated with the reigns of kings. But the moons or floods were probably never counted at the accession of a king, with the result that no one knows for how long a king reigned or even when he was crowned. Regnal time for the Aboh was either 'long' or 'short', but these concepts are vague and cannot be determined on an absolute time scale.

We are thus left with two interrelated options - the genealogies and the list of kings, both of which an earlier analysis shows to be fairly well preserved.[66] The literature on the use of genealogies for purposes of chronology point to their general unreliability. Like oral traditions, they have been held to be largely 'functional', and intended to buttress contemporary power structure. Available data,

largely drawn from Africa, show that some ancestors are dropped, in the phenomenon which Barnes has named "structural amnesia". Iona Mayer has advanced the hypothesis that such foreshortening of genealogies is "determined by the natural limits of historical record in a preliterate culture". The Gusi of Western Kenya, she further claimed, do not regard as real, or 'historical', any kinship categorization beyond the range of four generations.[67] For the Tiv of central Nigeria, Paul Bohanan found that "the operative time correlation of genealogical depth lies with Tiv political structure rather than with biologically accountable generation of ancestors".[68] After a thorough scrutiny of Igala traditions, Boston revealed that traditions based on generational count accounts for only a small fraction of Igala history.[69]

While such shortcomings are not to be discounted, the usefulness of the technique, does not seem to be in question where a fairly reliable set of genealogies can be found. While the argument of the 'functionalists' is valid, it must be noted that societies have their unique features, and in this as in the general field of oral traditions, some working chronology may be advanced on the basis of some knowledge of the culture. Lewis has shown in his study of the Somali, that genealogies are not inherently suspect, and that some of them can be useful materials for history.[70] Polynesian genealogies have similarly been accounted to

be fairly dependable for constructing absolute time scales.[71] It is perhaps necessary to emphasize the need to differentiate between the origins of a people, and the origins of a political structure in time and space. Too often, the two have been confused under the mistaken notion that the origins of a political system must lie in antiquity to be worthy of the historian's efforts. The beginnings of a political system need not be co-eval with the people. Thus, it is perfectly legitimate to inquire as to the origins of the monarchy in England without necessarily getting involved in the issue of the origins of the English people.

Reference has been made to the characteristics of Aboh genealogies. Attention was especially drawn to the fact that they were not the 'property' of individuals in the narrow sense of the word, and that people tended to know the genealogies of their neighbours, particularly competitors for offices. It must also be noted that although the genealogies were collected from the various sectors, they exhibit a striking similarity in length. One explanation for this phenomenon is the existence of mnemonic aids, and the religiously enshrined adoption of ancestral names in the ima agwu ritual. In every home, the ofo of succeeding generations from the apical ancestor are very carefully preserved. Most of these are cast in bronze, and therefore not subject to decay. Most okpala or patrilineage heads possess a rather remarkable faculty for identifying

which ofo belonged to particular ancestors. Other religious objects e.g. the ikenga or right hand of fortune, play the same role, and the use of this reinforces that of the ofo. In this case identification is even simplified, by the custom of placing one ikenga on top of the other in the same order as the ancestors stand genealogically. In this manner, an impressive totem pole is built up. Unfortunately, the ikenga, carved out of wood, are subject to decay, and consequently indicate fewer generations.

It should also be noted that inspite of the existence of umudei and ndichie, there are no 'competing' social classes in Aboh. For most offices, there are only competing lineages, and the competition is intra-class, not inter-class. In any event, each of the contesting lineage recognizes the right of its opponents to the office sought. While the umudei-ndichie dichotomy may be real, the absorption of the latter into the lineages of the former may be said to reduce any tendency towards the overt cystallization of classes.

This raises a major problem, for a dependent or slave absorbed into a lineage gave his genealogy as one 'born' into the family. The problem does not however exist for the kings who must be genital descendants. Finally, it must be emphasized that the Aboh possess no memory of succession disputes fought out on the grounds of forged genealogies. The contests have always involved candidates agreed to be potential kings by right of birth.

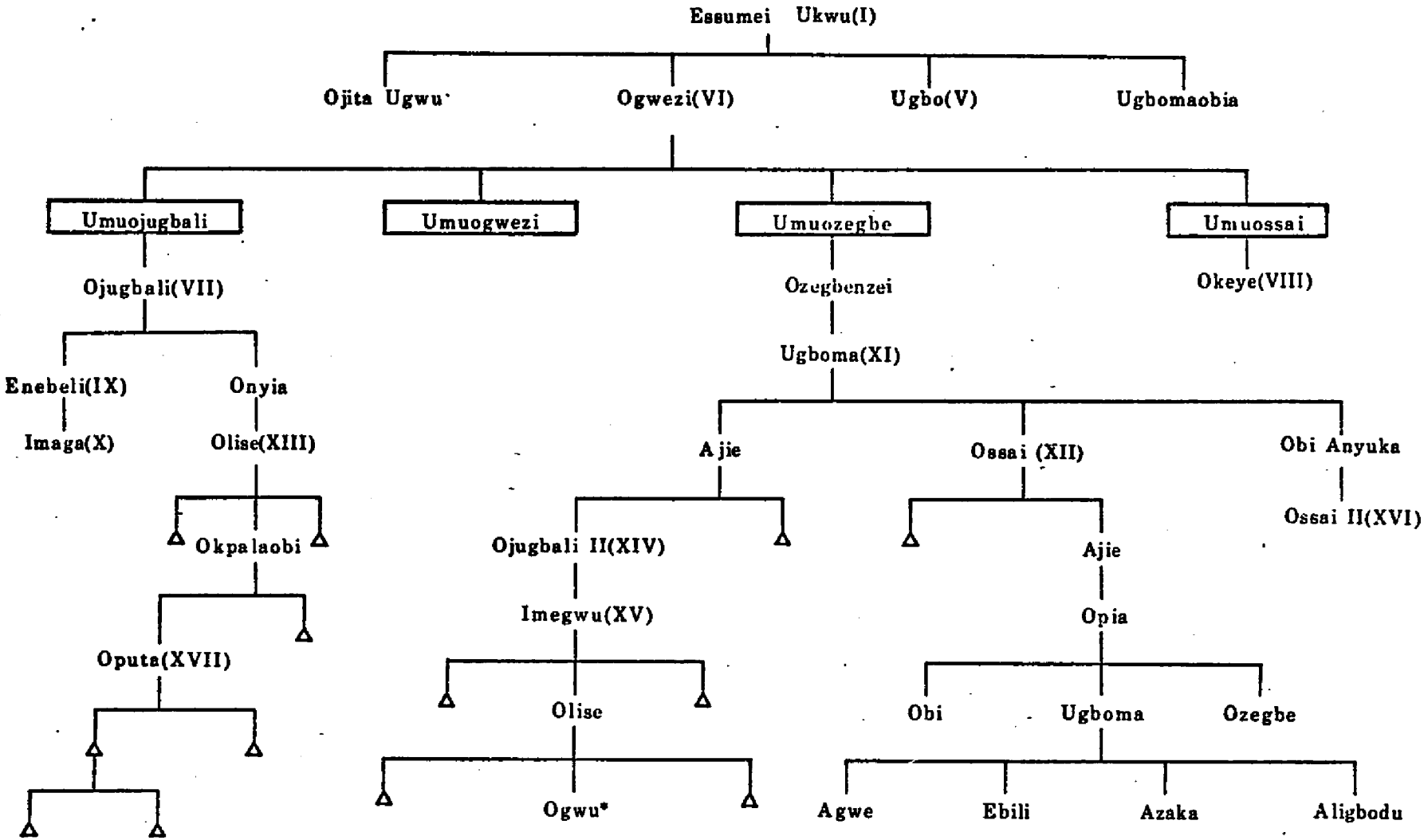
Since the genealogies of the four sectors or maximal lineages reproduced in this section place Essumei ukwu at the apex of the system, attention will be directed to resolving his status. Was Essumei ukwu a legendry or an historical figure? There are three possible answers to this question. First, Essumei ukwu was the leader of the emigrants from Benin to Aboh. Second, while he may have led the group out of Benin, he did not get to Aboh, although his memory has been preserved. Third, he was the last in a chain of 'leaders' who over generations, finally brought the emigrants to Aboh.

In considering the above propositions, it is essential to bear the general characteristics of tribal migrations in mind. Very often, the traditions tell them as if the movement was a swift journey. The Mfecane of Southern Africa, and the documented movement of Bantu tribes dispersed by Shaka, indicate the complex nature of tribal migrations.[72] The distance from Benin to Aboh, especially by the route indicated in the traditions is about 200 miles, and could not have been covered in one swift movement. Besides, the traditions tell of stops at Ossissa, Afor and Ashaka, where, with the exception of Ossissa, arrows had fallen. If each arrow is interpreted as indicating a 'long' stop, it seems valid to suppose that the movement that led to the founding of Aboh extended over a long period.[73]

It would then appear that Aboh oral traditions have represented the first vital stage in the history of the kingdom with the name of Essumei ukwu. This theory still has to contend though with whether or not Essumei ukwu was a historical figure, and if so, with what stage of this first epoch of Aboh history he is connected. From the popularity of the name Essumei, and other associated non-Igbo names in Aboh today, the Essumei of the traditions is no mythical being. Where he enters history is however a moot question. If he started out from Benin, then the genealogies have been foreshortened. On the other hand, it could be argued that he represented a figure of the final stages of the movement. In either case, the goals of this exercise - determining at approximately what time the kingdom began on its present site - would not seem to be seriously affected. However, given the development of the various nmemonic devices for preserving and recounting genealogies, and the development of a political structure, the principal office of which is based upon genealogies, it would seem valid to conclude that Essumei ukwu was the last in this chain of leadership.

The length of this chain of 'leaders' may never be known. Over how many generations the flight lasted, and how much time was spent at each of the stops can not now be determined. Indeed, it is not even certain that the

Table 5. Genealogy of Aboh Kings



*Ogwu Imegwu had been elected Uwa oma (Obi elect) but the disputed succession was later referred to the Midwestern Government. The result of the commission has not been published at the time of writing.

Note: Ozegbe (II), Opia (III), and Chiegwe (IV) do not appear on this table for reasons given in the text.

traditions remember all the stops, for several stops must have been made between Benin and Ossissa. The traditions of Onitsha actually tell of several stops during which a list of villages with the suffix Onitsha - were founded.[74] We may never know the impetus for further emigration from the various 'stops' indicated in the traditions, but it can be said that they bear no connection with the factors that led to the original flight from Benin.

The genealogies themselves indicate that there have been approximately eight generations from the apical ancestor Essumei ukwu to a base line of 1930. A baseline of 1930 has been selected because a majority of the sixty or more genealogies collected show a marked uniformity up to that point. A few are under eight at 1930, but a greater number exceed eight.

The acceptance of eight generations and a workable baseline still leaves the problem of what the Aboh generation should be. It is generally conceded that a generation is the time elapsing between the birth of a man and his first surviving child, but there is no agreement on what this 'time' is.[75] The mean length of a generation varies from one society to another, and depends on whether a society is matrilineal or patrilineal, and such factors as age at marriage and prevailing health conditions. In Aboh, the widespread practice of polygyny adds another dimension to the problem. For example, it has been found difficult to

trace a line through a series of first borns only. Again, although most men started having children early, say at 23 years, the general impression is that the children who survive into adulthood are those born when the men were a little older, say between 30 and 40 years.

In recent years, it has been customary to use 30 years as the equivalent of one generation, and although the reaction now is that a generation should be slightly less, 30 years would appear not unreasonable for Aboh conditions. At 30 years per generation, eight generations from a baseline of 1930 would yield a total of 240 years or a date of 1690 for the foundation of the kingdom of Aboh. Allowing for an error of 5 years per generation on either side of 1690, Aboh would have been founded about 1650 at the earliest or 1730 at the latest. Calculations based on what the traditions say about the early kings, and what documentation there are suggests that the kingdom must have been founded between 1650 and 1700, certainly no later.

Our analysis has thus far been restricted to an assessment of Aboh traditions and genealogies, and their implication for the construction of an absolute chronology for the kingdom. Comparative data from Onitsha, while not altogether fool-proof, sheds some interesting light on the dates Aboh genealogies lead us to postulate. In 1962, Mr. R. W. Hardings was invited by the Government of the then Eastern Region of Nigeria to conduct an inquiry into the dispute over the

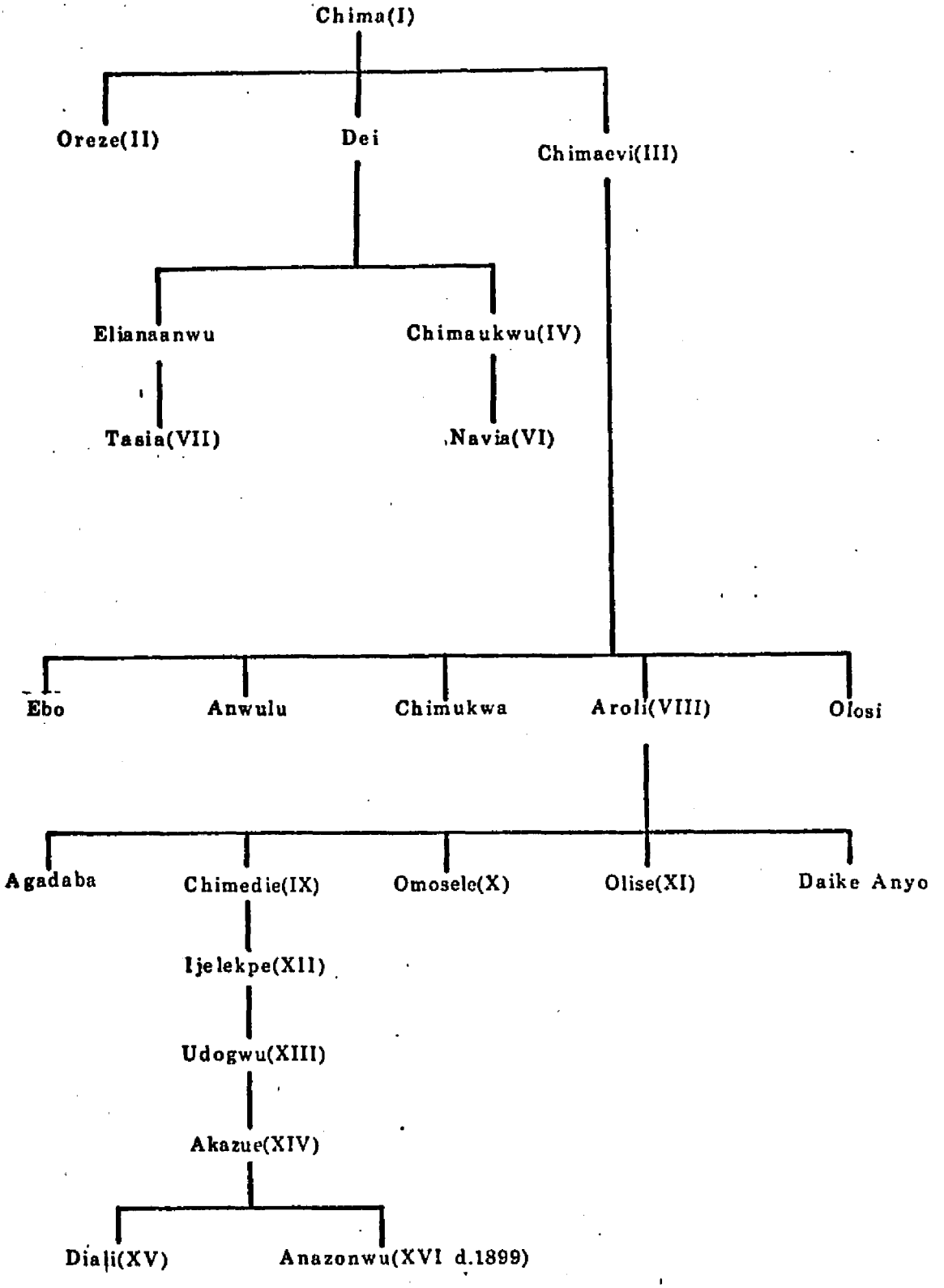


Table 6. Genealogy of Onitsha Kings

Source: R. W. Harding, OBE, The Dispute over the Obiship of Onitsha: Report of the Inquiry (The Government Printer, Enugu, 1963) p. 18.

obiship of Onitsha. He found "on strong grounds of probability that seven generations were born and married and died between Chima and Anazonwu". Anazonwu died in 1899. Hardings goes on to argue that

> all things considered, a reasonable date for the crossing of the Niger by Oreze is ... between 1650 and 1680.[76]

It is evident that Hardings used a baseline of 1899 or the equivalent of one generation less than the baseline utilized for Aboh. In other words, the kingdoms of Aboh and Onitsha, which are linked in the traditions, appear to have been founded in the seventeenth century. Of course, the conclusions drawn from a comparison of the genealogies and traditions are open to certain weaknesses. For example, it can not, on the strength of available data, be proved that Chima crossed the Niger from whatever place the last stop of the Onitsha group may have been, at the same time that Essumei ukwu crossed the Ase Creek. Yet all available evidence suggests that this was probably the case. It is significant to observe that one attempt by a local Onitsha historian, M. O. Ibeziako to date Onitsha history, places the founding of this kingdom at c.1630. The basis of his conclusion is not known, but Professor K. O. Dike would seem to agree with this date.[77] Nnamdi Azikiwe in an article on the origins of Onitsha suggests that the kingdom was founded in the seventeenth century.[78]

The seventeenth century dates suggested for the establishment of these riverain kingdoms would appear to be significant when considered in conjuction with the hypothesis developed by Professor K. O. Dike to the effect that the process of state formation in the Delta and along the banks of the Niger was generated by overseas trade. According to this theory, the banks of the Niger Valley were occupied as a last resort when further emigration to the coast was thwarted by the exclusiveness of the older established Delta Ijo.

> "With further migrations to the coast barred by the rise of city - states", wrote Professor Dike, "the lure of the great commercial highway of the Niger Valley itself stimulated another migration within the hinterland, and the hardy and adventurous people from Benin once again established themselves at places on the river bank favourable to trade".79

Although E. J. Alagoa, has argued that state systems existed in the Delta before the introduction of European trade,[80] there can be little doubt that the European demand for slaves had wider ramifications for the Delta and the interior. The trade certainly increased the value of the coast, and led to an increased population of the city states. But whether or not Aboh and Onitsha owe their origins to the opposition of the Delta Ijo is an open question.

It could be said however that the kingdoms grew in importance with the expansion inland of the slave trade in the eighteenth century. Indeed, the very features of the Niger Valley Trade - strategically located staging

centres along the 250 mile stretch - suggests that the Niger trade could not have existed long before the founding of the riverain kingdoms. Thus, it could be argued that the lurst for trade with Europeans led the Aboh in Ashaka to migrate to the present site in the seventeenth century, when the impulse was gradually filtering into the interior. In other words, while the remote causes for the settlement of Aboh is traceable to Benin, the immediate causes are to be sought in Ashaka.

Earlier writers argue for a much earlier date and literate Aboh informants, who claim any knowledge of the chronologies, place it even further in antiquity. Thus one authority, apparently basing his calculations on Egharevba's chronology for Benin kings, places the founding of Aboh at 1481 B.C.[81] Obi's unpublished manuscript which has held the stage among most literate Aboh, asserts that the Aboh left Benin in August, 1540, arriving at Aboh in March 1541.[82] Mr. G. B. Williams, relying solely on the evidence of P. A. Talbot thought that Aboh was founded about 1530.[83] Talbot himself reached this conclusion on the basis of a Benin tradition which states that various Bini rebels were driven towards the Niger during Oba Esigie's reign.[84]

It would seem however that these dates confuse two independent but related movements - the initial departure

from Benin, and the arrival at Aboh. Both movements could not have been identical, and were not undertaken by the same persons. The most that can be said is that the initial emigration from Benin was the first in a chain reaction which in time was to bring the Aboh to their present home. As already indicated, the movement from Ashaka may have been a direct response to the stimulus provided by trade. Thus, while the traditions point rather conclusively to the fact that various groups left Benin during Oba Esigie's reign in the first four decades of the sixteenth century, it is quite another matter to suggest that the kingdoms of Onitsha and Aboh were established in the 1530s.

As a matter of fact, Talbot by-passed evidence for a later date for the establishment of Aboh and Onitsha. If this date be counternanced however, it would mean that the emigration was begun and completed in a relatively short time by the same personnel. The Dutch trader David Nyendael who was in Benin in 1702 reported that

> two families appear to have left Benin at this time, one of which settled at Agbor, while the others went on to Obbior, whence some continued to Onitsha and others at a later date to Onitsha Olona. Of the same family came also the ancestors of Ezi Abongpa, Onitsha mili, on the east of the Niger and Onitsha Oko near Iselle ...[85]

According to Talbot, "it is said that the town of Abaw [Aboh] was founded at the same time by other Bini refugees", but he dismissed the idea in favour of the tradition that

Aboh was earlier planted to serve as "a Bini colony to hold the surrounding country".[86] From what is known of Aboh's poor geography, it is doubtful if any one could have contemplated building a garrison there. Nyendael's account is very imprecise, but it could be a reference to a later movement into villages already settled by earlier Igbo emigrants from the region of Benin.

The recorded tradition of A. F. Mockler-Ferryman lends some support to a later origin of the Aboh kingdom. Writing in 1889, Mockler-Ferryman said that "a century or more ago", Aboh belonged to the Akarai until the present owners entered it from Benin.[87] How many years over and above a century cannot be determined, but there is little doubt that Ferryman made specific inquiries as to time, and his informants gave the impression that their ancestors had not been about for too long a time. Again it is instructive to compare Mockler-Ferryman on the Aboh to A. G. Leonard on the Onitsha. According to Leonard, the Onitsha emigrated from the vicinity of Benin "between two and three hundred years ago".[88] Leonard conducted his research in the 1890s, and his estimate suggests anything between 1600 and 1700 years A.D. It is significant that the findings of Mr. R. Hardings agrees with that of Leonard, and that with comparable data, Aboh should yield virtually identical results.

There is some evidence from Aboh history to support a late seventeenth century beginning of the Aboh kingdom.

An Aboh tradition tells of a contest between the two sons of Essumei ukwu, Ugbo, and Ogwezi, for the Obiship after the death of their father and founder of the kingdom. The dispute became so fierce that both men decided to journey to Benin to have the Oba decide who was to be king. Ugbo the elder of the princes was elected. Ogwezi returned to Amegi, his mother's home, south-east of Aboh.[89] There is a Benin parallel to this tradition.

> In the reign of Erosayen [1735-1750] , two claimants to the stool of Ebo Aboh appealed to the Oba as their overlord to decide who was the rightful heir. The successful claimant was installed at Benin city as Obi or Eze of Aboh and sent with necessary insignia to his country. To secure the peace, the other claimant was sent to Ugbogui [a Benin village about 40 miles south-west of Benin] , and his only son was made one of the Emada [state sword hearers of the Oba] . About four years later ... they both left the city secretly for their native land. They were overtaken by the Ezomo Odia at Ugbokoniro ... They fought desperately but at length surrendered, and begged for mercy. The Oba pardoned them, but warned them not to enter Aboh, but they might reside anywhere else they wished.

According to Egharevba, the flight of the Aboh princes necessitated a fundamental change in a Bini festival - the Ehiekhu festival. The princes had fled Benin at a time when everyone was involved in this festival. It thus proved difficult to organize a pursuit. In order, therefore, to prevent any such delays in the future, it was decided that the two sectors of Benin-Ogbe and Ore Nokhua-were to observe the festival on different dates.[90]

But Chief Egharevba does not indicate the names of the princes, neither does the Aboh tradition say which

Oba occupied the Benin throne at the material time. The Aboh version claims however that this was the only known occasion when recourse was had to the Oba of Benin in a succession dispute. It is therefore not entirely unlikely that the princes involved in this incident were Ugbo and Ogwezi.

Chief Egharevba's assignment of dates to the Oba of the early period of Benin history is decidedly arbitrary. On the other hand, Professor Bradbury's analysis of Benin chronology indicates that Chief Egbarevba's dates for the period beginning about 1715 can be relied upon.[91] It is particularly noteworthy that Egharevba's date of 1735 for Eroseyen's accession has received independent confirmation in the records of the Dutch West Indian Company. Therefore, if the premise be accepted that Ugbo and Ogwezi came to Benin during Oba Eroseyen's reign (i.e. 1735-1750), it would follow that they had become adults in the 1740s say about 30 years old. As a corollary, Essumei ukwu, their father, probably lived into the early decades of the eighteenth century.[92]

The all-pervasive ritual and political influence of the office of the Obi of Aboh has been touched upon in an earlier chapter, and need not be repeated here.[93] In drawing evidence from the Aboh king list, it is first of all necessary to establish its accuracy in terms of the number of rulers on the list and the number of

generations such a list could conceivably span.

King lists suffer from two general weaknesses. They are either telescoped, where one name represents an epoch, or artifically lengthened. In some cases, the names of 'usurpers' are omitted. In other cases, kings whose reigns were regarded as a national disgrace, either because too many battles were lost, or because they were tyrannical, were removed from the orally transmitted king-lists. For example, the Ashanti of modern Ghana omitted the name of Osei II from the king list, apparently because he died in a battle which the Ashanti lost in the eighteenth century.[93] The Rwanda omit kings Rwaaka and Rutarundawa because they were regarded as 'usurpers'. According to John Nyakatura,

> the number of Abakama of Bunyoro seems to be few but because when a king dies, the Abahito who were fighting for the kingdom [and] the time they were spending fighting was not counted and also Omubito who was killed before 9 years passed was not counted as king.[96]

From the genealogical evidence available to us, it would seem that the Aboh king list could be adjudged relatively free from the kinds of discrepancies discussed above. Firstly, the Aboh do not have an 'official' king list. In other words, there is no one list approved by the king or any agency for transmission. Those who are interested in preserving and telling traditions have learnt the names of previous kings. In most cases, it is possible to check their evidence. Secondly, telescoping,

and artificial lengthening are phenomena more likely to occur under a system of hereditary kingship, where the institution is controlled by one lineage. Thus where a king was believed to have disgraced the lineage and the nation it embodies, the decision to exclude his name from the list was more easily reached.

The process would be expedited where there exists an official corporation entrusted with the preservation and transmission of oral traditions. But where, as in Aboh, the monarchy is elective, it is more difficult to add or drop kings from the list, because no one lineage has a monopoly of it. In point of fact the succession disputes which followed the death of every king further reduces such possibilities. Each contesting lineage preserved a list of its own kings, and also learnt the names of kings from the other gates for the purpose of staking valid claims. In Aboh, evidence presented by one lineage is cross-chiecked by three other ruling houses, and under such conditions forgery could be difficult. The Aboh would appear not to have considered the idea of deleting the names of kings whose reigns were judged to be tyrannical. The one name preserved in the traditions - Obi Ozegbe - is also preserved in the list. The nearest the Aboh came to excluding Ozegbe from the list was to bind his <u>ofo</u> in chains, and kept separate from the others.

King lists like oral traditions may suffer distortion from failings in the memory of those who transmit

them. In the first place, it would seem highly improbable for all the four ruling houses in Aboh to forget one name at the same time. Secondly, the Aboh have minimized the possibility of forgetting the names of their kings through the use of nmemonic aids - the ofo nze which enshrine the names of the kings, or at the very least, their numbers, in the memory of the people.

It might be argued that the ofo nze are not fool proof evidence. Some of them could have been damaged or lost, in which case, the kings they represent would have inadvertantly disappeared from the list. There are however some counter arguments. Firstly, the death of a king outside Aboh does not detract from his sacred status. Tradition tells of two Obi whose remains lay buried outside Aboh, but whose names are preserved by their personal ofo nze. The possibility of an Obi dying in battle as in the Ashanti example is minimized by the fact that as religious leaders of the community, they were not expected to go into battle. The ofo nze seem to have survived the bombardment of Aboh in 1883 by the British navy, for the ofo of the Obi at the time is counted along with those of his predecessors and successors.

There exists no tradition of 'usurpers' in Aboh, and everyone would seem to have respected the divine status of an Obi once he was anointed. Thus, Prince Aje, the son of Obi Ossai, who contested the stool with Olise of

Umuojugbali and was generally described as the 'king' of Aboh by European visitors in the 1850s, is not so regarded by his descendants. It was conceded by all that Aje was the most powerful figure on the Niger at the time, but every Aboh regards Olise as the Obi.

The greatest weakness in the Aboh monarchical system is the prevailence of protracted interregna. The prevailing custom is that the death of an Obi is not publicly announced until after three years, but how old the tradition is cannot be ascertained. Evidence from documented cases indicate that most interregna extend over ten years. For example, Obi Ossai I died in 1844; thirteen years after in 1857, when Baikie and Crowther reached Aboh, the position had still not been filled. Six years elapsed between the death of Obi Ossai II in 1910 and the accession of his successor in 1916. It is six years now since Obi Oputa died (1964), and the throne has not been reoccupied. It could therefore be appropriate to say that there are fewer years in which there are kings than years during which the throne was vacant. Unfortunately there is no accurate method of determining the effects of this on the over all chronology. Therefore, 'reign' in this context will be used as marking the time elapsing between the accession of one king and the election of another.

We do possess a fairly accurate time scale for the reign of Obi Ossai I, and have in addition a correct list

of his successors and the order of reign. It would appear safe to assume that roughly identical interregnal patterns characterize the era before Obi Ossai I as after. It is therefore possible, by extrapolation, to obtain some very rough idea of when the Aboh kingdom began.

ABOH KING LISTS

Ikenna Nzimiro	B. C. Obi	Chief Ijoma Essumei
1. Ogwezi	1. Essumei	1. Essumei
2. Ojugbali	2. Ugbo	2. Ozegbe
3. Ossai I (Okeye)	3. Ogwezi	3. Opia
4. Opia	4. Ojugbali I	4. Chiegwe
5. Ozegbe	5. Okeye	5. Ugbo
6. Essumei	6. Opia	6. Ogwezi
7. Enebeli	7. Ozegbe	7. Ojugbali I
8. Imaga	8. Essume	8. Okeye
9. Chiegwe	9. Enebeli	9. Enebeli
10. Ugboma	10. Imaga	10. Imaga
11. Ossai II	11. Chiegwe	11. Ugboma
12. Olisa	12. Ugboma	12. Ossai I
13. Ojugbali II	13. Ossai I	13. Olise
14. Imegwu	14. Olise	14. Ojugbali II

15. Ossai III	15. Ojugbali II	15. Imegwu
16. Oputa	16. Imegwu	16. Ossai II
	17. Ossai II	17. Oputa
	18. Oputa	

Sources: F. Ikenna Nzimiro, Chieftaincy and Politics in Four Niger States (Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge University) 1966, pp. 191-3.

B. C. Obi, History of Aboh, (unpublished manuscript, 1956). Obi's dates for Aboh kings appear in Appendix C.

Chief Ijoma Essumei, Ndanike of Aboh, Umuojugbali, Aboh.

A close look at the three lists reveal some discrepancies. It is evident however that they all show a remarkable uniformity from the reign of Obi Ugboma i.e. the seven last reigns, both as to number and order. Even in the list of kings before Ugboma, a striking pattern reveals itself. There are, for example, four blocks of names which repeat themselves in every list. First, Ogwezi Ojugbali I and Okeye; second, Ozegbe Opia and Essumie; third, Enebeli and Imaga. Lastly, Chiegwe stands oddly alone in all three lists.

Nzimiro would appear to have accepted the list he obtained as definitive, for no where do we find a criticism or analysis of it. Besides, he does not furnish the source of his information. We find however that Aboh traditions do not provide any corroboration to parts of his list.

For example, he eliminates Ugbo, who appears on the other two lists, and a king whom traditions say abdicated in favour of Ogwezi.[97] Again, while tradition is explicit as to the fact that Essumei ukwu was the founder and first Obi of Aboh, Nzimiro makes Ogwezi the first Obi, relegating Essumei to the sixth position. Thus, the inclusion of Obi Ugbo in Nzimiro's list, and the rectification of Essumei ukwu's position would eliminate the major discrepancy in this list.

B. C. Obi would appear to have duplicated Essumei in the first and the eight reigns. No where in the traditions do the Aboh tell of two Essumei who were kings. It is noteworthy that cases where two kings have borne an identical name - Ojugbali and Ossai - the traditions have recorded these. The elimination therefore of one Essumei from B. C. Obi's list would remove the major discrepancy here.

The first two lists are not entirely independent of each other. B. C. Obi's list was certainly available to Dr. Ikenna Nzimiro who acknowledges this fact by reference to Obi's manuscript. Chief Ijoma Essumei's list is however independent of both, and is the most internally consistent and in full consonance with the traditions. Chief Essumei, as Ndanike of Aboh, holds one of the five highest titles in the land, and had privileges which neither Obi nor Nzimiro had. For example, as a senior <u>umudei olinzele</u>, he was always

present at the annual uje ritual when sacrifice is offered to the ofo nze. All the chiefs who have participated in this ceremony and have seen the ofo nze say that there are sixteen in all.[98]

The resolution of the problem of how many kings Aboh has had leaves us with the issue of the order of reign. Few of the people interviewed claimed to know the exact order of succession beyond Obi Ugboma. Those who claimed any knowledge assert that Ugbo, Ogwezi, Ojugbali and Okeye reigned in that order. All place Essumei ukwu at the apex of the list, but there was hardly anyone who could identify the positions of Ozegbe, Opia and Chiegwe. From the blocks of names identified earlier there is little doubt that Essumei, Ozegbe and Opia reigned one after the other, while Enebeli and Imaga also followed each other. It is odd that the traditions are vague as to the order of reigns in the middle era of Aboh history. Thus, after Essumei, much remains obscure until the reign of Ugboma. It is tempting to suggest that some telescoping or lengthening may have occurred here, but the existence of the sixteen ofo nze weakens such a hypothesis. In this and the following chapter, the order of reigns suggested by Chief Ijoma Essumei will be adopted as being the most consistent with evidence from the genealogies. Besides, the Chief has a reputation for being very well informed on the early history of Aboh, and even the older chiefs respect and subscribe to his opinions.

A minor point, the issue of absolute chronologies for the reigns of each of the kings on our list, ought to be commented briefly upon. B. C. Obi has devised a time scale for the kings on his list,[99] but he does not supply the source of his information or the basis for such exact dating. Enquiries concerning the number of years each Obi ruled met with no precise response, such as is implied in Obi's datings. From what has been said about time perspective in Aboh, it is obvious that there does not exist any basis for definite knowledge in this respect. It ought to be pointed out that there is no evidence of memory aids for recording the lengths of reign as is known for some African states. In some instances, Obi's dates do not correspond to available documented evidence. Thus, he dates Obi Ossai's reign at 1839-1852, where as it is known that Obi Ossai was king before 1830, and died in 1844. Again, no provision is made for the 'mandatory' interregna of three years, not to mention documented cases where they exceed ten years. Obi's dating is therefore clearly arbitrary and can hardly be relied upon.

In building up any absolute time scale for Aboh, it would seem expedient to work backwards from reigns about which there is precise information to the less known. This extension of known data into the remote, and relatively unknown past of Aboh is of course based on the assumption that there

is some continuity in Aboh history. On the face of available evidence this assumption does not appear to be far-fetched. For example, there would appear to be a reasonable correlation between the genealogies - approximately eight generations and the list of seventeen kings, or an average of two rulers per generation.

For the purpose of this analysis, Obi Oputa (1916-1964) will be excluded. His reign of 48 years would appear to be untypical of earlier periods. Between Obi Ossai II (d.1910) and Obi Ossai I, Aboh has had three reigns, those of Olise, Ojugbali II, and Imegwu. When the Landers reached Aboh in November 1930, Obi ossai was already on the throne of Aboh. Unfortunately, it is not known for how long he had been king before this visit. Assuming, however, that he became Obi in 1830, a total of 80 years elapsed to 1910 when Obi Ossai II died. Eighty years for five reigns would produce a mean length of reign of 16 years, inclusive of the interregna. By extrapolation, 16 years for each of the preceeding eleven reigns (Essumei to Ugboma) yields a total of 176 years or A.D. 1654. Professor Douglas Jones has suggested that sixteen years is probably on the high side of the scale and that 14½ years per reign is ideal for West African conditions of this time.[100] Even this estimate produces 232 years or 1678 A.D. This is not far short of dates derived from using the genealogies.

It is perhaps of some significance that evidence from the Onitsha king list synchronizes with dates arrived at for the Aboh. Both monarchies are elective, and like Aboh, Onitsha is chracterizes by long interregna. For example, for years elapsed between the death of Okosi I (1931) and the election of Okosi II in 1935.

ONITSHA KING LIST

1.	Chima	10.	Omosele
2.	Oreze	11.	Olise
3.	Chimaevi	12.	Ijelekpe
4.	Chimaukwu	13.	Udogwu
5.	Chimaezie	14.	Akazue
6.	Navia	15.	Diali
7.	Tasia	16.	Anazonwu (d.1899)
8.	Aroli	17.	Okosi I (1900-1931)
9.	Chimedie	18.	Okosi II (1935-1961)

Source: R. W. Harding, OBE, The Dispute over the Obiship of Onitsha: Report of the Inquiry (The Government Printer, Enugu, 1963), pp. 15-19, Table A.

From the Onitsha list worked out by R. W. Harding, it will be seen that until 1899 when Anazonwu died, Onitsha has had a total of 16 kings. This compares very favourably to a list of 16 kings for Aboh to 1910 when Ossai II died.

The 17th king on the Onitsha list, Okosi I (1900-1931) can be assumed to be the contemporary of Obi Oputa (1916-1964), and their exclusion from the analysis could therefore have very little impact on the results.

While it proves nothing by itself, it is significant that Obi Olise of Aboh and Obi Udogwu of Onitsha whose reigns are well documented are not only contemporaries, each is the 13th king on the lists. All the evidence taken together - the traditions, genealogies and king lists suggests that both Onitsha and Aboh have experienced an almost uniform development into modern times.

A comparison with evidence from Benin yields some interesting results. Admittedly the Benin and Aboh systems of monarchy are not identical, and succession by primogeniture in the former would ordinarily produce a longer mean reign. It is to be stressed, however, that primogeniture did not become entrenched in the Benin system until the reign of Oba Ewuakpe (1700-1710).[101] Assuming that the Benin list is reasonably accurate, a point which most authorities appear to concede, sixteen reigns on Chief Egharevba's list carries us as far back as the reign of Oba Akenzae (1661-1669).[102] The Benin average regnal length is about 19 years which can be attributed to the system of succession, but the large measure of coincidence with the seventeenth century date reached for Aboh is indeed remarkable.

This chapter has dealt with two interrelated problems, that of the origins of the Aboh kingdom, and the probable date for the beginning of the institution of kingship. An analysis of the Aboh traditions weighed against comparative data from several sources, indicate that the kingdom was the end product of a chain reaction set up by an exodus from Benin about the middle of the sixteenth century. However, the immediate impetus for the establishment of the kingdom on its present site is to be traced to Ashaka, and may have been connected with the development inland of the overseas trade. Evidence is regretably inconclusive as to the direct influence of Benin on Aboh. However, reference to a Benin prince in the traditions, although dated to Ozolua (fifteenth century) is better accounted as a later occurrence, dateable to the eighteenth century, and an aspect of the expansion of the power of Benin into Igbo country west of the Niger.

Evidence on chronology indicates that Aboh could not have been established as a kingdom before 1650, but was certainly in existence by 1700. In the following chapter, an attempt is made to piece together what fragmentary evidence oral traditions and documented materials yield on the early history of Aboh.

NOTES

[1]The variant which follows is that told by Chief Opia Ijoma, Ozea of Aboh (informant No. 8 in Appendix A). Of the many variants collected in the course of this writer's field investigations, Chief Ijoma's is by far the most detailed, and also the most representative.

[2]The word ukwu ordinarily means 'big' or 'great' in the Aboh language, but it is said to mean none of these in the traditions. Some say it is derived from the Benin honorifice title for the Oba - uku akpolokpolo. A variant of this title dates from Oba Ozolua, whom the Aboh say is the father of their ancestral founder, but other variants say ukwu is the name of Essumei's mother. It may in fact mean 'big' or 'great' and has found its way into the traditions in order to differentiate the early figures from later generations.

[3]The traditions say that these arrows were cast in bronze (ona).

[4]Some variants add Akarim to the list of "brother princes". Akarim was said later to have founded Obodougua.

[5]The ubediagana incident is one of the best remembered of the early wars in Aboh history. Ubediagana was said to have attacked Aboh canoes trading to Igala, but there is some disagreement as to when the incident occurred. After countless interferrence with Aboh trade, the Aboh finally mounted an expedition in which one Osunkpunkpu from Emu in Ukwuani hid in the war canoe against the wishes of his overlord. With the aid of a charm, the chief ingredients of which were the head of a child, locally manufactured blade (okishi), a new pot, and a chamelon, Osunkpunkpu succeeded in killing Ubediagana. The head of this warrior was brought to Aboh where the jaws were extracted as part of the Igbu society ritual.

It was said however that the head sunk down at Ogbe Akpanuka in Umuogwezi, and there grew up on the spot, an anagba tree, which the Aboh point to when they tell the story of Ubediagana's career. The jaws were however taken by Osunkpunkpu to Emu where it is said to be the chief object in the Emu shrine (nze).

[6]One variant of this phrase is alabinoto.

[7]See R. E. Bradbury, "The Kingdom of Benin", D. Forde and P. Kaberry, West African Kingdoms in the Nineteenth Century (Oxford 1967), pp. 5-6; and A. F. C. Ryder, Benin and the Europeans (New York, 1969), pp. 1-23.

[8]W. B. Baikie, op. cit., p. 286.

[9]A. F. Mockler Ferryman, op. cit., pp. 234-5.

[10]C.S.O.26/3. File No. 26769, Williams, "Report on the Ibo Speaking Clans of the Kwale Division of the Warri Province, 1929".

[11]C.S.O.26/3. File No. 26769, Captain E. A. Miller, "The Aboh Intelligence Report, 1931".

[12]I am indebted to Mr. S. B. Omoregie, an official of the Midwest State of Nigeria Ministry of Education, Benin who collected this tradition from Chief J. Egharevba. The tradition was communicated to the writer in a letter dated August 15, 1968.

[13]Chief J. U. Egharevba, A Short History of Benin (Ibadan, 1968), p. 13.

[14]E. Kaine, Ossomari: A Historical Sketch (Onitsha, 1963), pp. 98-99.

[15]This visit is confirmed by Chief J. Egharevba.

[16]A Leonard, The Lower Niger and its Tribes (London, 1906), p. 36.

[17]Nnamdi Azikiwe, "Fragments of Onitsha History", p.474.

[18]J. W. Hubbard, op. cit., pp. 82-84. See Appendix B, for the full text of Obi Oputa's version. See also Kwale District 5, File No. ANA 39, Notes on the relationship

between the Kwale Towns and the Obi of Aboh, Dec. 15, 1928. The District Officer Mr. E. R. Chadwick reported that he was informed by one Ugboma that the "Abohs were accompanied from Benin by the Onitshas whose descendants live at Onitsha on the Niger ..."

[19]Interview with No. 12, in Appendix A, Ashaka, January 1970.

[20]C.S.O.26/3. File No. 26769, R. J. Hook, "Intelligence Report on the Ika sub-tribe of the Ibo Tribe, 1932".

[21]Hubbard, op. cit., p. 199.

[22]Leonard, op. cit., p. 35.

[23]Bradbury, "The Kingdom of Benin", in Forde and Karberry, West African Kingdoms, p. 6; also, Ryder, op. cit., pp. 13-16.

[24]Interview with No. 4, in Appendix A, Aboh, April, 1970.

[25]Mockler-Ferryman, op. cit., pp. 234-5.

[26]C.S.O.26/3. File No. 26769, Hook, Intelligence Report on the Ika sub-tribe of the Ibo Tribe, 1932.

[27]Interview with No. 12, in Appendix A, Ashaka, January 1970.

[28]Egharevba, op. cit., pp. 26-7.

[29]Kwale District 5, ANA 39. Eweka II, Oba of Benin to D.O. Benin Division, Feb. 29, 1928. See Appendix D for a reproduction of Oba Eweka's letter.

[30]A variant of the Ossissa tradition actually denies this claim to a princely status. Ossissa's father, Osumili is said to be an Igala who settled in Benin, from where his sons, amongst whom was Ossissa fled during a civil war. C.S.O.26/3. File No. 26769, Hook, "Intelligence Report on the Ika sub-tribe of the Ibo Tribe, 1932.

[31]The Itsekiri of Warri also have a tradition in which an arrow shot at Benin landed at the Itsekiri ancestral home of Ode Itsekiri. In 1956, when the present writer visited Ode Itsekiri, otherwise known as Big Warri, he was shown the stump of a rusted metal encircled with bottles buried upside down. The stump, according to a local historian was the tail end of an iron arrow allegedly shot from Benin, and was miraculously traced to Ode Itsekiri by Prince Giniwa (the Iginua of Benin traditions). Instead of a dog, a charmed calabash floated on the river closely followed by the canoe carrying the immigrants.

[32]Afor clan has a population of 3,931 compared to Aboh clan 5,354, Ashaka 3,761, and Ossissa 3,518. Nigeria, Department of Statistics, Population Census of the Western Region of Nigeria, 1952, Bulletin No. 9, (Lagos: Census Superintendent, 1953), pp. 1-4.

[33]The writer is familiar with engagements broken off because some of the parents object to any serious romance affair with the Iwele group.

[34]The Ngulu is one of the many gods in the Aboh pantheon. Located in the premises of the official palace, the ngulu comprises three sub-deities - Ossai ngulu, and two others which are identified simply as ngulu. The word ngulu is synonymous with 'heartland' or ancestral home. Its location within the palace yard is in itself significant. The Aboh conceive of the ngulu as a protector goddess, and the most powerful sanction for those who contravene taboos. Its priest is specially appointed by the Obi of Aboh, and he alone is empowered to offer sacrifice before the shrine.

[35]To this day, navigation on the Ase is much obstructed by snags.

[36]Supra , pp. 27-28.

[37]Baikie, op. cit., p. 286.

[38]Mockler-Ferryman, op. cit., pp. 234-5.

[39]C.S.O.26/3, File No. 26769. Williams "Report on the Ibo speaking clans of the Kwale Division".

[40]Kaine, op. cit., pp. 98-9.

[41]Interview with No. 4, in Appendix A, Aboh, April 1970.

[42]Interview with No. 25, in Appendix A, Warri, Dec. 1969.

[43]Hubbard, op. cit., p. 202.

[44]J. S. Boston, "Notes on Contact between the Igala and the Ibo" Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, 2, (1960), p. 54.

[45]Baikie, op. cit., p. 286.

[46]Vansina, Oral Traditions, pp. 173-182 presents a summary of the contributions which these disciplines cam make to oral historiography.

[47]I am indebted to Mr. Ernest Emenyonu for his views on this subject. Mr. Emenyonu is a Ph.D. candidate in the field of African Literature at the University of Wisconsin, and is currently finishing his dissertation on traditional Igbo literature.

[48]Such popular eastern Igbo names as Okoye, Nwankwo, Amadi, Ngbeke etc. are not borne by the Aboh.

[49]V. C. Uchendu, The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria, pp. 41-44. According to Uchendu, "the institutions which are utilized in the political process of the village include amala oha (general assembly) the title - making societies, the Dibia fraternity the secret society, oracles and the age grade associations, Leadership is provided by the ofo holders, the titled men and women of wealth,

who have risen spontaneously in the village and have developed their power and influence". Also C. K. Meek, Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe, pp. 88-251, and Magaret Green, Ibo Village Affairs, (London, 1947), pp. 1-145.

[50] G. T. Basden, Niger Ibos, (New York, 1938), p. 131.

[51] Dike, op. cit., p. 26.

[52] Bradbury dates the eastward expansion of Benin between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. Bradbury, "The Kingdom of Benin", Forde and Kabbery, West African Kingdoms, pp. 4-5. Also A. C. Ryder, "Ife Benin Relationship", Journal of African History, 6 (1965), pp. 35-6.

[53] C.M.S. GA3/03, 1883, Archdeacon Danderson Crowther.

[54] See copy of Oba Eweka's in Appendix C.

[55] Michael Crowder, A Story of Nigeria (London, 1962), p. 55; See also Bradbury, "The Kingdom of Benin", in Forde and Kabbery, West African Kingdoms, p. 5.

[56] Lander and Lander, op. cit., 2, pp. 213-4.

[57] Ibid., p. 214.

[58] Kwale District, 5, File No. ANA 39, District Officer Benin to District Officer Aboh, Feb. 1928.

[59] Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., 1, p. 1010.

[60] Lander and Lander, op. cit., p. 219.

[61] See for example Frnak Willett, Ife in the History of West African Sculputure, pp. 153-173; Compare however with A. C. Ryder, "Ife-Benin Relationship", pp. 29-30. Also William Fagg, "A bronze figure in Ife style at Benin", Man, L(1950), p. 98.

[62] Forde and Jones, op. cit., p. 15.

[63] Baikie, op. cit., p. 47.

[64] See for example D. H. Jones, "Problems of African Chronology", Journal of African History, XI 2(1970), pp. 161-176.

[65] Mr. William Cole, agent for the factory of messres Macgregor Laird, who was resident on Aboh for about two years in the latter 1850s, remarked on the use which the Aboh made of the phases of the moon and thought that it would be easy to convert this into an absolute chronology.

> From actual observation, I learn that they begin their months upon the appearance of the moon, and not before. Should you ask a negro his age, he will look at you, and recurring to some event which happened about the period of his birth, he will probably tell you he is some hundred of years growth; but you may be enabled to solve the mystery by dividing the number of years given by twelve, as by that number of moons, we calculate our own year, the quotient obtained being the number of years he may have seen.

Firstly Cole was wrong in stipulating the divisor twelvee, for there are thirteen lunar months in a solar year. Secondly, it would take quite some calculation to achieve this conversion. In any event, it would be difficult to place the occurrence by which the individual marks his birth in an absolute time scale. William Cole, op. cit., p. 155.

[66] Supra , pp.25-27.

[67] Iona Mayer, "From Kinship to common descent: Four genealogies among the Gusii", Africa, 35, 1965, pp. 336-384.

[68] P. Bohanan, "Concepts of Time Among the Tiv of Nigeria", Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, 9(1953), pp. 251-262; See also Laura Bohanan, "A Genealogical Charter", Africa, 22(1952), pp. 301-315.

69 Boston, "Oral Tradition and Igala History", Journal of African History, 10(1969), p. 35.

70 I. M. Lewis, "Historical Aspects of Genealogies in Northern Somali Social Structure", Journal of African History, 111, 1(1962), pp. 35-48. According to Lewis, "the genealogy which every child learns by heart at a tender age and which often goes back as many as twenty or thirty generations to the clan-family ancestor is permanent and unchanging".

71 J. F. G. Stokes, "An Evaluation of Early Genealogies used for Polynasian history", Journal of the Polynesian Society, 39(1930), pp. 1-42. See also H. J. Fletcher, "The use of Genealogies for the purpose of dating. Polynesian history", Journal of Polynesian Society, 39(1930), pp. 189-194.

72 J. D. Omer-Cooper, The Zulu Aftermath (London, 1966).

73 F. E. Chukwuma, an Aboh school teacher who has engaged in some studies of Aboh history shares this view. According to Mr. Chukwumah, the migration took "nearly two hundred years before reaching their present home in the Niger Delta". See F. E. Chukwuma, "Notes on Aboh History" (unpublished manuscript), n.d.

74 Forde and Jones, op. cit., p. 47. The villages in the Chima complex include Agbor, Oligie, Emuhu, Onicha Ugbo, Onicha Ukwo, Onicha Olona, Issele Agagba, Issele Mkpitime, Obior and Ezi.

75 E. Alagoa "Dating Oral Tradition", African Notes, 4, 1(1966), pp. 6-10.

76 R. W. Harding, The Dispute over the Obiship of Onitsha: Report of the Inquiry, Official Document No. 6 of 1963, (The Government Printer, Enugu, 1963), p. 18.

77 M. O. Ibeziako, Some Aspects of Ancient Civilization, 91937), p. 13, cited in Dike op. cit., p. 26. See also P. A. Talbot, The Peoples of Southern Nigeria, 4 Vols. (London, 1926), I, p. 168, pp. 234-5.

[78] Nnamdi Azikiwe, "Fragments of Onitsha History", p. 474.

[79] Dike, op. cit., pp. 23-27.

[80] Alagoa, "Long-Distance Trade and States in the Delta", Journal of African History, XI, 3(1970), pp. 319-329.

[81] Interview with informant No. 4, Aboh, April 1970.

[82] B. C. Obi, "History of Aboh" (unpublished manuscript, 1956), pp. 13-19.

[83] C.S.O.26/3, File No. 26769. Williams, "Report on the Ibo speaking clans of the Kwale Division".

[84] Talbot, op. cit., 1, p. 158.

[85] Ibid., p. 168.

[86] Ibid., pp. 168-9. Talbot suggests that the migration should be dated to 1530.

[87] Mockler-Ferryman, op. cit., p. 234.

[88] Leonard, op. cit., p. 35.

[89] Interview with informant No. 4, in Appendix A, April, 1970.

[90] Egharevba, op. cit., pp. 41-2.

[91] R. E. Bradbury, "Chronological Problems in Benin History", Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, 1, 4(1959), pp. 263-287.

92 F. E. Chukwuma, whose unpublished manuscript has been referred to (Footnote 72) says that Essumei reigned in the eighteenth century. The source of this information is however not given.

93 Supra, pp. 15-17.

94 Vansina, "The use of Oral Tradition in African Culture History", in C. Gabel and N. R. Bernet, (eds.), Reconstructing African Culture History, (Boston, 1967), pp. 61-2.

95 Ibid.

96 John A. Nyakatura, Abakama ba Bunyoro-Kitara (The Bakama of Bunyoro-Kitara), translated by John Rowe, p. 55, in manuscript, cited in a recent paper by David P. Henige.

97 Infra, pp.

98 The writer interviewed Chief Ossai Okechukwu, the Otono of Aboh one of whose function it is to lay the ofo nze before the Obi on such occasions. He confirmed that he always set down a total of sixteen ofo nze before Obi Oputa.

99 Obi's chronology is reproduced as appendix E, and should be compared with the chronology in this work.

100 Professor Douglas Jones' comments are contained in a letter to the writer dated June 27, 1969.

101 Bradbury, "The Historical uses of comparative Ethnography with special reference to Benin and the Yoruba", in Vansina et al., The Historian in Tropical Africa, pp. 155-6.

102 Egharevba, op. cit., King list in Appendix I, pp. 73-4.

CHAPTER FIVE

EARLY HISTORY

The Aboh regard Essumei Ukwu as the founder of the kingdom as well as its first Obi or king. It would however be decidedly wrong to consider the establishment of the kingdom as the achievement of one man, or indeed the exercise of one generation. Although Essumei Ukwu is not a legendary figure,his place in Aboh history is better appreciated as a name that has been used by tradition to represent a long period of creative political evolution. As has however been suggested, Essumei Ukwu represents the last of a long line of 'political leadership' in the earliest phase of the gradual development of the Aboh kingdom. A distinctive weakness in Aboh historiography,--the conception of time in dynastic terms--places special difficulties in any attempt to reconstruct the undocumented past. It becomes impossible then to know anything about Essumei Ukwu's ancestors, and the events which led to his 'coronation' as king.

It is doubtful if Essumei Ukwu's contemporaries saw him as king. The traditions say that Ozoma Ukwu of Ashaka ordered that the Aboh should no longer pay tribute to him, and they (the Aboh) thereupon set Essumei Ukwu up as Obi. The pertinent question however would appear to hinge on the

problem of model. If Ashaka, to which the Aboh owed allegiance, had no obi or king (and still does not have one), where did the Aboh get their model? It would appear therefore that Essumei Ukwu's status was analagous to that of an okpala ukwu (the eldest in the community), and his house a kind of major domo. The obiship as it exists today is the product of a cumulative process of history, and could not have begun and completed in Essumei Ukwu's era. That Essumei Ukwu should have an ofo even where we appear to be denying him the position of obi, in no way detracts from our hypothesis. The Ashaka people possess a brass ofo nze, that of Ozoma Ukwu, to which the okpala ukwu and chiefs offer sacrifice annually. Yet they do not have kings.

When Essumei Ukwu lived can only be surmised. On the basis of evidence from the genealogies, the most that can be said, at this point of our knowledge, is that he was born about the middle of the seventeenth century, and probably lived into the early decades of the eighteenth century.[1] The concensus of Aboh traditions is that the conquest of the Akarai, perhaps the most significant event in the early phases of Aboh history, occured during the reign of Essumei Ukwu. The occupation of Aboh, the building of the first houses upon the ruins left behind by the fleeing Akarai, and the gradual but steady conquest of the environment as well as the process of establishing contact with neighboring villages, must have had their own memorable episodes. Unfortunately, nothing concrete is preserved

to the fact that they all reigned in succession after Essumei.[3]

The first of the trio is said to be Obi Ozegbe, mention of whom has earlier been made. The traditions say he was exceptionally cruel, and on one occasion ordered his subjects to fell a large cotton tree (akpu). He however instructed that the tree be held up in the air and not allowed to fall to the ground. In an attempt to carry out the monarch's command, a number of people were crushed to death. On another occasion, he assembled the citizenry on the shores of the river and tossed a grain of alligator pepper into the river with an order that it should be recovered promptly. For several days, they tried abortively to retrieve the grain of pepper, and each day Ozegbe threatened to unleash his savage anger on them. Finally, an Onya subject (a village south of Aboh) came up with a brilliant idea. He dived into the river with a grain of alligator pepper concealed in his mouth, and surfaced shortly after with the grain in his hand. Obi Ozegbe was reported to be so delighted with this rare feat that he freed the entire village of Onya from a tributary status.[4] No one seems to remember any other example of Obi Ozegbe's viscousness, but all confirm that there were several other acts and that the king was in truth a tyrant. Ironically, informants recount his deeds with some fondness, and refer to him as eze obi oku i.e. "the hot-tempered king". Details of his death in a pit dug by palace aides on the

in the traditions about this phase, and very little may ever be retrieved.

Traditions are uncertain as to what followed after Essumei Ukwu. As has been indicated, very few people claim any knowledge of the order of succession after Essumei Ukwu. One account, indeed the only account, is that he was followed on the throne by three of his 'brothers' in succession, and that it was only after these that Essumei's children appeared on the stage.[2] The vagueness characterizing this 'middle age' of Aboh history can mean one of three things. Firstly, each 'king' like Essumei Ukwu represents an epoch, not a single reign. Secondly, all the names taken as a group, and expressed in the symbolic number 'three', represents the era after Essumei. Indeed, one might go so far as to include all four (i.e. along with Essumei) as representing the first phase in the kingdom's history. Thirdly, the names and reigns are real, and expressive of what the traditions tell about them. It is tempting to pick the first two alternatives, but the fact that traditions are vague on this issue does not render the period and persons any less historic. Whatever choice is made has to contend with the existence of sixteen ofo nze, which show, as far as can be ascertained, that there is no gap anywhere. Traditions say that none of the three kings had any children (a remarkable coincidence), but the fact that no one in Aboh traces his descent from any of these three kings lends some credence to the tradition as well as

instigation of the chiefs are recorded elsewhere, and need not be repeated here. Suffice it to say that the evidence at our disposal suggests that an obi to whom the Aboh attribute these acts did reign. Thus, Obi Ozegbe's ofo is chained to an Ikenga and kept away from those of the other obi. This device, it is believed, locks his wicked spirit in place, and saves the kingdom from his baneful influence. But it is doubtful if Ozegbe met his death as the traditions tell it. It is difficult to believe that a pit deep enough to kill someone could have been dug inside the king's house without his knowledge. Given the tools for digging available at the time, it would have covered a considerable time, and the king would certainly have found out. It can not be said that every member of his household hated him that bitterly. It seems probable therefore that Ozegbe was assassinated by certain elements opposed to him, and the traditions twisted somehow to give the act a stamp of general approval.

Obi Ozegbe's succesor was Obi Opia, who is immortalized in Aboh traditions as eze obi omiko, i.e. "the kindly king". Paradoxically, no one seems to remember any specific acts connected with his reign that earned him the nickname. One account says that Obi Opia developed agriculture and fishing, and was among the early Obi to lay out the new framework of long distance trade to Igala,[5] but it is doubtful if any one Obi could lay claim to any of these developments. Like Obi Ozegbe, Opia is immortalized in Aboh history in the

ɨsu ani obi opia i.e. "the face of Obi Opia's earth" located in Onuobikwu. His burial within the confines of the city is said to be in accordance with his wishes. Childless, he had asked to be buried in a conspicuous spot, so that every Aboh could bring him offerings. To this day, offerings are regularly brought to this spot, which the Aboh also regard as the earth deity.

The last of the Essumei Ukwu 'brothers' to rule Aboh was Obi Chiegwe. Chiegwe in Aboh traditions was, like Opia, a 'good' king. In point of fact, the Aboh are always contrasting the unique circumstances of his election to the sometimes bloody contest which characterized the later monarchy. According to traditions, Chiegwe was a particularly poor man. One day, his wife who had been hard pressed by hunger persuaded Chiegwe to go into other people's oba (yam stack) to steal some yams. In the dark of night, Chiegwe went out with a basket in hand, but returned instead with what the Aboh call gwala gwala, a fleshly fruit that resembles the African yam, only that it grows on the tree. The unsuspecting wife commenced cooking the 'yams'. She fired the pot for hours on end, but the 'yams' would not cook. She finally fell asleep by the fireside. Next day, or sometime later, Chiegwe who was kneading mud for his house was surrounded by an enthusiastic crowd who dragged him out of the mud pit, and carried him on their shoulders to the palace where he was anointed obi. Apparently, word of his honesty--a man who would rather starve to death than

steal from people--leaked out to the populace who were at the time contemplating the choice of a successor to Obi Opia.[6]

It is pointless analyzing the tradition for the event it narrates is far too idealistic to pass without some qualification. It would appear however that the end of Chiegwe's reign signals a close to another major epoch in Aboh history. Such a hypothesis is borne out by the fact already mentioned--that none of the genealogies collected include the names of Obi Ozegbe, Opia and Chiegwe. Besides, no one of the four sectors or ruling houses claim any of these kings as coming from it. One account is that all three kings, plus Essumei Ukwu, reigned in Ugboko Ukwu and that it was only during Ogwezi's reign that the Aboh moved in to occupy the land vacated by the Akarai.[7] If this version is assumed to be correct, it would indicate that the conquest of the Akarai occured much later after Essumei Ukwu. This piece of evidence has a wider implication for Aboh history. For example, the Benin tradition of Chief Egharvba mention Ogbeze as the prince sent from Benin to rule Aboh after it had been conquered from the Igbo. A variant by Obi Oputa makes Ogwezi, not Essumei Ukwu the leader of the emigrants from Benin.[8] Again, the tendency of the Aboh to regard Ogwezi as their father, adding Essumei only when further inquiries are made, leads one to the tempting conclusion that Ogwezi's reign marks a new period in Aboh history: a Benin intervention

in Aboh, and the true beginning of the obiship. The only snag with this line of reasoning is Egharevba's date of Ogbeze's arrival at Aboh to Oba Ozolua (c. 1480-1501), and the sixteen ofo which indicate some continuity in Aboh history.

Before going into further details about Ugbo and his successors, it is necessary to comment briefly on the pattern evidenced in the three reigns that have been discussed. It is obvious that we have here a succession of 'ideal' type kings which contrasts very sharply. First, there was the 'founder' and father of the kingdom, personified by Essumei Ukwu and then came the wicked Ozegbe who almost ruined the kingdom until he had to be assassinated. His successor was the kindly Opia, who is associated with the beginning of trade. Both kings have finely contrasting nicknames. One is 'hot tempered', the other is 'kind' and 'good.' Finally comes Chiegwe who had the crown forced on his head. It can thus be argued that the traditions are probably exaggerated, and may have attributed aspects of the character of one king, and some of the events associated with one reign, to another because these agree with their various images.

The traditions aver that the next actors on the Aboh stage were Essumei Ukwu's children, Ogwezi and Ugbo. One account says that they were in their teens when Essumei Ukwu dies, and holds this as the reason why the latter had to be succeeded by his "brothers", Ozegbe, Opia and Chiegwe.9

The Aboh say that both men engaged in a bitter contest for the throne, and seem to explain this incident by reference to the rule of primogeniture. There is conflicting evidence as to which of Ugbo and Ogwezi was older, but some say that Ugbo the younger of the two ingratiated himself with the elders and got himself elected Obi. Some date this event to the years following Essumei Ukwu, while others say it was post Chiegwe. But all agree that Ogwezi was absent from Aboh and was at Amegi for an unspecified number of years when Essumei died and Ugbo was made Obi.

Amegi, said to be Ogwezi's maternal village, is only a short distance southeast of Aboh, and it is highly improbable that he should have been away for so long, (some say he was away for two years), with little contact with Aboh. It is stranger still to contemplate what Ogwezi could have been doing away from Aboh, so early in Aboh history, when there was little economic specialization and most people either farmed or fished. In any case, from what is known of succession to the Aboh throne in later times, it is difficult to believe that Essumei Ukwu died without Ogwezi's knowledge, and Ugbo chosen to succeed, again without the former's knowledge. The traditions say that Ugbo reigned for a 'short' time, and that even this was marked with trouble, a reference no doubt to some armed conflict. It is tempting therefore to suggest that the traditions in the case mask a break between Essumei Ukwu and Ugbo, and actually represent a possible intervention

from outside,perhaps the coming of "Ogbeze" from Benin. The argument that Ogwezi was the older of the two Essumei sons is not entirely convincing for such a rule should have continued to dominate the Aboh monarchial system. The difficulties in interpreting this part of Aboh history are further confounded by versions--from Aboh and Benin--suggesting that this contest was resolved in Benin.[10] This piece of evidence, taken in conjunction with Archdeacon Crowther's 1882 map suggests a close contact with Benin. It lends greater weight to the hypothesis that Ogwezi must have been the beginning of a second phase in Aboh history. Here again, the continued existence of sixteen ofo, representing the kings to have reigned in Aboh suggests a continuity, and a literal acceptance of the traditions the way they are told.

It is still difficult to devise an absolute date for these early kings. On the assumption that Ugbo and Ogwezi were the princes who went to Benin during Oba Erosayen's reign (1735-1750), it would be safe to conclude that Ugbo and Ogwezi lived in the middle of the eighteenth century, with the latter surviving into the third quarter of the eighteenth century. Although OBI UGBO is said to have had a very brief and troubled reign, the Aboh trace the source of all their social and political ills to this period. Ogwezi is said to have succeeded in ousting Obi Ugbo, through the use of a charm. The latter on his way out counter swore that there would forever be political and

social discord in Aboh.[11] Ugbo is said to have migrated to Orogun where he died, but traditions from Umuebu, Umukwata, Abbedei and Obiaruku indicate that his descendants spread over much of Ukwuani country.[12]

It was earlier stated that the Aboh people actually regard themselves as "children" of Ogwezi, although they attribute the establishment of the kingdom to Essumei ukwu. Some actually trace most of the refinements in the office of the obi and the Aboh chieftaincy institution to Ogwezi. It could be, as one account has it, that it was under Ogwezi that the Akarai were driven from Aboh town, and the process of occupation begun. [13]

For example, the founders of the sectors comprising the city are believed to have been sons of Ogwezi. Although very little else is remembered of his reign, it is certain that the kingdom had already begun to participate in active trade with the Ijo of the Delta. One account actually asserts that Ogwezi established friendly contact with the Ijo tribes of the Delta, and contracted for the delivery of large trading canoes.[14] While these early developments are largely conjectural, the process of lineage segmentation touched upon earlier strongly suggests that long distance trade was begun under royal auspices, and that the obi was the foremost figure in this trade. The crystallization of the obiship may therefore be traced to the increasing differentiation in economic power as a consequence of the monarch's involvement in the lucrative trade in slaves.

One of the best remembered stories of Ogwezi is his marriage to an Iwele woman, by the name of Ine. Some say the move was intended to bridge the long standing animosity between the Iwele and the Aboh, but however, Ine got into Aboh, her name has become immortalized in the legend of "the iron pots of Ine" (ite ona Ine), which to this day lie in the old palace yard. It is of some interest to note that the Landers reported seeing "a large iron tank," which they learnt "was used by the king as a bath."[15] The visitors could have been referring to the larger of the "pots" one of which is an immensely large rectangular tank with a rounded opening. Whether or not they date to Ogwezi's reign, is difficult to tell. Ogwezi had many children, the best known of whom were Ojugbali, Onya Awaji, Okeyea Ine, Ugboma Obia, Agidigbo and Ozegbe Nzei. The suffixes after the names ordinarily refer to their mothers since it was usual for two or more children to receive the same name. In the case of Ojugbali, however, oji, means 'black,' an indication that he was dark skinned.

There is a great measure of agreement on the point that Ogwezi was succeeded by his eldest son Ojugbali oji. Internally, there is evidence that significant changes were beginning to take place in the political sphere. For example, an Aboh tradition tells of a "civil war" involving the umudei and ndichie social classes, in which the latter emerged victorious. As a counterpoise to the ndichie threat of domination, OBI OJUGBALI I (the numeral I will hereafter be used to distinguish him from a latter obi of the same name)

created eight new umudei titles. These were the Okwa Ossai ukwu and the Okwa umu.[16]

This piece of evidence is of some interest, and has far reaching implications for Aboh history. First, it indicates that the so called ndichie class were no push overs in the past. If Aboh traditions that these were aliens and slaves be accepted at face value, there is another indication that the increasing importance of Aboh as an inland port of trade had led to an increase in the population of this class of people, and that the type of lineage segmentation discussed earlier was beginning to occur at this period of Aboh history. It is significant that the obi chose to 'create new titles' rather than quell an 'unconstitutional' uprising, but this tradition does suggest that the political 'superiority' of the umudei class was not always there, and was part of the evolution of a stratified society in Aboh.

One version of the Aboh traditions claims that in the reign of Obi Ojugbali, Aboh war canoes went to Onitsha to assist the immigrants in their struggle with the Oze aborigines.[17] Onitsha traditions aver that the country was originally owned by the Oze whom the Onitsha drove further inland. It has not been possible to check this tradition in Onitsha, but if it should contain some truth, we may find here further confirmation of a seventeenth century origins of the Aboh and Onitsha kingdoms.

Commercial contact with the Delta Ijo is also said to have been more firmly established. B. C. Obi traces

the origins of war canoes in Aboh to contacts which Obi Ojugbali I was able to establish with the Brass. Through the Brass, cannons, guns, gun-powder, cotton goods and metal wares reached Aboh at this time. There is however little doubt that the foundation of Aboh's future role as the entrepot of the lower Niger, was laid as early, if not earlier than Obi Ojugbali's time. There is no evidence as to when Ojugbali I reigned but the event could conceivably be dated to the years between 1750 and 1775.

Obi Ojugbali I is reported to have died while his children were still very young. This is most probably a rationalization of the fact that he was succeeded by his half brother Okeyea. OBI OKEYEA is said to be the son of Ine, the Iwele wife of Obi Ogwezi whose name has been linked to the tanks in the royal palace. Some confirmation of Obi Okeyea's maternal identity is afforded by the fact that all the Iwele population in Aboh is concentrated in the sector begun by the king. Aboh traditions say that the Iwele began settling in Aboh about this time, and that the king personally encouraged his maternal kin to come to Aboh, providing them with land in his own sector.

Obi Okeyea is said to have devoted much of his energies to the development of the kingdom's naval power, and trade. Under him, communication was opened with the Ata of Igala, with a view to allowing Aboh traders in his domains.[19] This trade in all probability pre-dated Obi Okeyea, and was

probably carried out at several intermediate staging places. Thus the reference to Obi Okeyea in this tradition is an indication that Aboh-Igala trade, the main axis of the Aboh economic system, was more firmly regularized by friendly contact at this time. Initially, the trade was conducted at Ubom afia (sand-bank market) between Onitsha and Asaba, but the Anam of the Anambra persistently harassed Igala merchants, thereby obstructing the flow of trade. It is doubtful if the Igala developed war canoes, to counter this menace, but the Aboh resorted to travelling far north into Igala under the escort of war canoes. It is still not possible to date with any precision the reign of Obi Okeyea, but this may have occured between the 1770's and 1780's.

At Okeyea's death, the crown reverted to OBI ENEBELI who is reported to be the eldest son of Obi Ojugbali I. The new king was taken up with the problems of raids into the Niger organized by the Ijo--apparently for slaves. Tradition recalls several Ijo expeditions into the creeks of Odoni which succeeded in checking the Ijo menace.[20]

There is some evidence that the Ijo did constitute a serious problem to residents of the Lower Niger. Mr. I. Palmer, Diplomatic Agent for the Royal Niger Company, who was very conversant with the lower Niger south of Onitsha, noted that only the Aboh were sufficiently powerful on water to stop the Ijo raids, and that "as a price of protection, the villages had to acknowledge the obi's overlordship."[21]

Although there is no time perspective in Palmer's evidence, it is possible that the Aboh were beginning to expand their influence about Obi Enebeli's time, (i.e. 1790s to 1805) to embrace several "vassal" or "tributary" villages around the Niger Valley.

The traditions also mention slave raids into Abarra Osimili on the Niger. Somehow, this evidence is corroborated by Abarra Osumili sources in the 1920s.

> 'Before the days of the government", noted the okpala uku of Abarra Osumili, "obi of Aboh used to send his men to drive us. When we heard them beating drums we used to know that it meant war and we used to run to Abarra uno. They were not strong on land, but knew how to pull canoes. We did not know how to fight on water. Therefore we used to try to ambush them. If we were on water, they captured us to sell. If we captured them, we killed them.[22]

The drum referred to in the above statement was the ekele, a musical instrument and one of the main features of the Aboh war canoe. If raids were organized as far north as Abarra Osumili, it is certain that such raids were carried out on communities nearer home. Here again would be one incentive for the smaller village communities around Aboh to come under the influence and protection of the obi or run the risk of being raided and destroyed. There is no solid evidence for dating Obi Enebeli's reign, but working on the basis of our rough chronology, this probably covered the last decade of the eighteenth century.

Enebeli's successor, OBI IMAGA, is said to be the eldest son of Enebeli. All that the traditions preserve of

his memory is that he was comely. And he must have been handsome, for the Aboh say to this day that someone looks as handsome as Imaga. Although it is still not possible to date reigns with any certainty, Obi Imaga most probably reigned during the nineteenth century, perhaps between 1805 and 1820.

The next obi was UGBOMA, a grandson of Obi Ogwezi. His father, Ozegbe nzei is said to be one of the youngest sons of Ogwezi, certainly the youngest of the four who founded the present sectors of Aboh. Unlike the other sons of Ogwezi, Ozegbe was not a trader. He practised divination, and gained renown and wealth in the country around. Not without surprise, Ozegbe was never elected king. Even his son Ugboma, (by Awaji, a woman from Ndoni) who became the first of Ozegbe's line to be king, died shortly after his installation.

Traditions, which begin now to be less clouded and more loaded with details, say that Ugboma was a very old man when he was elected king and reigned for only "eight months." (a reference no doubt to eight moons).[23] If, as the table of reigns indicate, Ugboma became king after two uncles (Ojugbali I and Okeyea), and two cousins (Enebeli and Imaga), it seems close to reality that he was truly old when elected, and died shortly afterwards. Here again, it seems reasonable to suppose, allowing for an unspecified interregnum, that Ugboma reigned during the second decade of the nineteenth century, somewhere between 1810 and 1820, probably for not

more than one year.

The election of OBI OSSAI I marks the merging point of myth and history, for it was during his reign that Europeans first visited Aboh, and documents begin to appear. Onuobikwu sources say that Ossai, the only son of Ogene Enede of Emu in Ukwuani, was the eldest of Obi Ugboma's sons. Although the city was unanimous in its choice of Ossai, his half brothers, under the banner of Aje opposed his candidature. The latter's mother Ogene Enede enlisted the support of people from Emu, and after a long dispute, Ossai occupied the throne. That many of his Emu supporters decided to live permanently in Aboh (they constitute the Ishiobodo ward) indicates that the dispute was long drawn, but it was probably not destructive since those engaged were essentially from one ruling house.

Although we lack definite evidence as to when Ossai I was crowned king, it is possible in his case to arrive at a more reliable date. When the Lander's reached Aboh in November 1830, Ossai had been king, although for how long, we may never know. The explorers described him as "a sprightly young man"[24] while in 1835, Captain Glover estimated his age at 35 years.[25] Allen and Thomson who reached Aboh in 1841 thought that Obi Ossai I could not have been "much under fifty."[26] Dr. Vogel of the same expedition placed him at between 50 and 60 years.[27] If these independent, but fairly consistent estimates are anything to go by, Obi Ossai I could have been about 50

years in 1841, which would place his birth between 1786 at the lowest and 1791 at the highest. If, as tradition holds, his father Obi Ugboma died at an old age, Obi Ossai probably ascended the Aboh throne in his middle age, say between 35 and 40 years. It is thus safe to assume that he became obi about 1826, certainly not before 1820.

By the late 1820's when Obi Ossai I ascended the throne, the city's control of the lower Niger trade was almost complete. Drawing from evidence which come mainly from Obi Ossai's era, Professor Dike asserts that in the nineteenth century,

> the town of Aboh exercised what amounted to a monopoly of trade up and down the Niger valley ... The entire trade of the Niger was held up at will by her war-canoes armed with brass and iron cannons.[28]

As the nineteenth century wore on, Aboh was to become involved in a death struggle with the British to save her position as the entrepot of the lower Niger, but Professor Dike's statement belies the general impression that the country behind the coast was little more than an "interior region of production"[29]

An adjunct of this hypothesis is that the so called "hinterland" constituted an economic and political appendage of the coastal kings. The evidence from the reign of Obi Ossai to the end of the century however shows that the Lower Niger had a system of commerce all of its own, although, closely linked to the coastal states. Far from being "dependents" producing goods for the coastal middlemen,

"hinterland" people like the Aboh, Ossomari and Onitsha who controlled strategic points through which goods flowed to the sea, organized a market system, which was primarily geared to profitable exchange.[30]

The reign of Obi Ossai I is so intimately woven with European activities and policies on the Lower Niger, that it is necessary at this stage to provide a background to the events of this and succeeding reigns. Almost nothing was known of Aboh until the mystery surrounding the termination of the River Niger was unravelled in 1830 by John and Richard Lander. From about the last quarter of the eighteenth century when the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa was innaugurated, to November 1830 when the Landers made their epochal discovery, British commercial interest had been sharply focussed on the Niger and the prospects it held for inland trade. Until the 1830's, European merchants, notably the British from Liverpool, were content to obtain tropical commodities through the middleman pattern in which the Ijo of the coastal states organized trading expeditions into the interior ports to purchase commodities for their European patrons.[31] These states, as remarked in an earlier chapter, were strategically placed to prevent any unwelcome interference in the interior, and they tapped this advantage to the utmost since their existence depended to a large extent on the established middleman position.[32]

The discovery of the mouth of the Niger changed all

this. The publication of the journals of the exploring brothers, and the advertisement that the expedition gave to the resources of the Niger valley generated a fever-pitch enthusiasm in Britain.[33] The Scot, Macgregor Laird, who had been in the ship-building industry with his father's firm of William Laird and Sons, left the relative security of this business to promote the African Inland Commercial Company. Voicing the sentiments of several others, Laird said that,

> the long-sought-for highway into central Africa was at length found ... To the merchant, it offered a boundless field for enterprise, to the manufacturer, an extensive market for his goods.[34]

The sole objective of the A.I.C.C. was to establish trade on the Niger valley and for this purpose, an elaborate expedition was organized in July 1832. Enthusiasm was not however sufficient to surmount the tremendous problems posed by inland trade. The expedition turned out to be a dismal failure,[35] but the strategy which Macgregor Laird had devised became the cornerstone of the policy of British merchants. In this endeavor, they received the active support of the British Government.

It might be said that Laird's strategy constituted an ominous threat to the survival of the coastal city states who, for over three hundred years, acted the role of link-men between the Europeans and the markets of the interior. Even on the occasion of Laird's first visit, the Ijo faced this threat squarely. At Abonta or Kurotumbi, a wooding

party was ambushed, and seriously attacked.[36] In 1833, Richard Lander was grounded off the Ijo village of Angiama, and an attempt to rescue him met with sustained gun fire.[37] Thus any sustained contact with the interior markets would necessitate the establishment of a more permanent base, and this was what Laird sought to provide.

Laird's strategy for trade in the interior involved an alliance between English merchants and Obi Ossai I. He was himself a member of the 1832 expedition to the Niger which succeeded in obtaining first hand knowledge of the existing pattern of trade on the River.[38] It was thus very strongly thought that such an accord would stop all the channels through which palm-oil reached the coast.

> 'No man,' wrote Laird, 'has greater power to do this than he [Obi Ossai I] has, situated as he is at the head of the three great outlets of the Niger, the Benin, the Bonny, and the Nun.[39]

The Trotter expedition arrived at virtually the same conclusion in 1841. Allen and Thomson observed that Obi Ossai who was king of the "largest town in the Delta," is "one of the most powerful and influential rulers on the banks of the river." This strength they attributed to the location of Aboh at the apex of the Delta which enabled Obi Ossai "to control very much the trade towards the sea."[40]

What kind of man was this merchant prince of the Niger Valley? From the fragmentary descriptions of Obi Ossai I left us by the various expeditions to Aboh during his reign, the king was well over six feet tall and thick set.[41]

William Simpson described him as "stout and ill favoured, "[42] but Macgregor Laird thought that he was "particularly handsome." He was reported to have a rather prominent nose, and a pleasing expression of countenance.[43] The Lander brothers who had been given to expect a ferocious monarch, found Obi Ossai good natured and possessed of "an eye which indicates quickness and intelligence.[44] Macgregor Laird was "much struck with the gentlemanly and agreeable manner of Obie," whom he added, "is decidedly the most intelligent black man I have yet met with and far superior to those on the coast."[45]

Obi Ossai was particularly receptive to the idea of direct trade with the Europeans. He had good reasons to entertain such a proposition. The kingdom over which he presided was by far the leading market for palm-oil and other tropical commodities which Europeans sought. He was doubtlessly aware of the great profits which the coastal merchants made on the palm produce he sold them. For example, the Brass who paid between £4 and £5 per ton for palm oil at Aboh, resoled these to Europeans for anything between £12 and £20. This represented a profit margin of over 300 per cent. According to C. C. Ifemesia, the great and ever increasing demand for produce on the coast as well as European manufactures in the interior had created a situation of "rivalry between the brokers of Bonny and Brass over the trade at Aboh, the first clearing centre in the middleman pattern of trade on the Niger."[46]

It was little wonder that Obi Ossai was reported to have had nothing but "great contempt" for the Brass and

Bonny people whom he characterized as "rogues," and "vagabonds." In an audience with Laird, Obi Ossai took exception to the fact that the 1832 expedition did not find it expedient to tarry and trade at Aboh instead of going further up the River. He described himself as the "greatest palm-oil king", and threatened to block the Niger against all traffic unless the Europeans "bought and sold with him."[47] He actually withheld the delivery of 1,000 yams he had promised Laird until an agreement to trade in palm-oil had been concluded with him.[48]

Perhaps the greatness of Obi Ossai lay in his realization of the fact that after the Landers, the Niger would no longer remain a "closed" river. He recognized the role which European trade could play in consolidating his power on the Niger, and his aim was therefore to attract the bulk of the trade from Igala southwards to Aboh. Of course, he already had this control, but British friendship would add a color of legitimacy and greater prestige to the situation. Put simply, Obi Ossai sought to institutionalize his position as the middleman of the lower Niger.

From the evidence at our disposal, Obi Ossai was not issuing an empty threat. The great reverence with which King Boy of Nembe-Brass treated him is sufficient evidence of the control which the coastal peoples thought he exercised over their trade. Laird was greatly amused at King Boy's conduct during an audience with Obi Ossai. The Brass king, reported Laird, "never spoke to Obie [Obi Ossai] without going down

on his knees and touching the ground with his head." When Laird enquired as to the reason for "his abject behaviour," King Boy responded: "King Obie too much palm-oil, King Boy too little."[49]

It was this steady and extremely profitable market that the coastal city states, notably the Brass, wished to protect from the British. In point of fact, so much violence and despair attended Laird's first trading mission that the idea of establishing trading relations with Obi Ossai was temporarily shelved. In 1835, John Beecroft, who was later appointed British Consul on the Bights, led an expedition to Aboh and Idah the aim of which was to counter the propaganda and distrust of the coastal men. A shrewd bargainer who was clearly aware of his interests, Obi Ossai tried to persuade Beecroft not to go beyond Aboh. He entreated him

> to remain and give him the goods; he would send his own people to trade for ivory and such things as might be had.[50]

Beecroft saw through the Obi, and impressed upon the monarch his determination to visit the markets of the north. Obi Ossai was therefore content to secure British friendship and goodwill with a present of two cows and 800 yams. Beecroft on his part advanced the Obi credit for 20 puncheons of oil, both to encourage trade, and to demonstrate the confidence the British reposed on him (Obi Ossai).

Obi Ossai was greatly impressed with Beecroft's show of confidence, particularly when the consul advanced him more credit on his return from Idah. An additional three

bullocks and 2,000 yams were given to Beecroft who wrote approvingly to his home government. On the occasion of Obi Ossai's visit to the Quorra, Beecroft made him swear on the Bible that

> he would always be a friend to white men and protect them from injuries within his jurisdiction.

The Aboh monarch, who seemed to have realized that the opening up of the Niger would lead to European rivalry, demanded in return that Beecroft should swear by "jew jew to be his friend, and to assist him should his kingdom be threatened by other whitemen."[51]

However, very little benefit accrued to Aboh from these early contacts. That Obi Ossai had all along looked forward to the fruition of the promises of trade with him is borne out by the reception he gave the 1841 British Expedition under the command of Captain Henry Trotter. Britain, it must be recalled, had prohibited her subjects from further participating in the slave trade in 1807. The Abolition Act did not however put an end to the traffic in human beings, owing to increased demand for Brazilian and Cuban sugar, as well as cotton from the United States. Worse still, the malignant trade in slaves, placed incalculable difficulties in the paths of British traders who were attempting to develop traffic in the natural products of Africa.

The British Government attempted to induce other nations to follow in her footsteps by concluding treaties with them,

and even instituted a naval squadron to guard the coast of West Africa. In spite of these efforts, the volume of slaves exported from West Africa increased during the first four decades of the nineteenth century. This situation led to the intervention of the Anti Slavery Movement under the leadership of Thomas Fowell Buxton.[52] The 1841 Expedition already referred to was largely the consequences of the exertions of this body.

The strategy of the Anti-Slavery Movement was in every respect similar to that recommended by Macgregor Laird. It was aimed at a frontal attack on the slave trade at its source in the markets behind the coast. When finally, the expedition set sail, its objectives were three fold--to promote legitimate trade on the Niger Valley, to conclude treaties with the chiefs of the Niger Valley abolishing the slave trade, and to establish a model farm at the confluence where African would learn improved agricultural techniques.[53]

The expedition arrived at Aboh on August 26, 1841, and in an audience with the commissioners, the objectives of the mission as well as the articles of the Anti Slave Trade Treaty were explained to Obi Ossai. He reportedly displayed good judgment, intelligence, and sincerity, and was said to have understood the clauses of the treaty he was about to engage in. According to Allen and Thomson, each time an agreeable clause was explained to him, he expressed his acquiescence by the emphatic use of the word makka, i.e. "it is good."[54]

The Treaty with Obi Ossai, executed in August 28, provided

for peace and friendship between Britain and Aboh, the abolition of the slave trade in Aboh and all territories over which the obi exercised sovereignty and the institution to the benefit of the contracting parties of legitimate trade. It also provided for the appointment of a British resident at Aboh, whose duty was to protect British interests, and to ensure that the terms of the treaty were observed. The agreement guaranteed Obi Ossai 5 per cent custom duty on all imported goods and Britain assured for herself the right to freely navigate the Niger.

Obi Ossai was immensely pleased with the new treaty, which for the first time set on paper concrete plans for British trade with him. Since 1832 when Laird brooched the plan, he had hoped that this would come to pass. It was therefore no surprise that the treaty was greeted with wild festivities in Aboh.

> "Fires", reported Allen and Thomson, "were lighted in several parts of the town and sacrifices of sheep and goats offered to the fetiches. The tom-toms and other musical instruments were played all night.55

To say that Obi Ossai received the idea of legitimate trade with outstretched arms is not to say that he had been particularly anxious to discard the slave trade. Far from it. Both his personal fortunes and the power of his kingdom had grown from the profits of the slave trade. One of the commissioners of the 1834 Expedition, Commander Cook, observed that Obi Ossai and the Atah of Igala were shrewd and intelligent men who were "perfectly alive to their own

interests." They had been particularly evasive of questions put to them regarding the slave trade.[56] The Obi candidly admitted before Reverend Schon that it would be difficult to give up the slave trade.[57] His feelings and those of his subjects were adequately summarized by one of his chiefs:

> White people first told us we should sell slaves to them, and we sold them; and white people are now telling us not to sell slaves, and we will not sell them again ... if white people give up buying, black people will give up selling ....[58]

Whatever reservations the Obi might have had about the slave trade was however suppressed in an outward show of sincerity. According to the Rev. Schon and Crowther, Obi Ossai

> fulfilled his promise and told his people that he had given up the slave trade for ever; and prohibited all his subjects from engaging in it any more, threatening all who should violate his contract with severe punishment.[59]

Simon Jonas reported later that when some Bonny merchants (whose port had been blockaded by the British Navy) brought slaves to sell at Aboh, they were informed that Obi Ossai had put an end to the slave trade. Obi Ossai was not only content to stop trading in slaves, he offered to stop the peoples of the interior from further dealing in slaves and requested supplies of arms as "his doing so would involve him in a war with his neighbours."[60] At the same time, a rich supply of arms would enhance his political authority vis-a-vis the neighbouring peoples.

There is evidence that Obi Ossai was uneasy about destroying the existing middleman pattern of trade before

the alternative was found to be adequate. His fears were well founded, for as later events would show, direct trade with the British proved to be both poorly organized and inadequate.

> "The substance of Obi's frequent interruptions", we are told, "was that if he abolished the slave trade, his people must have some occupation by which to obtain subsistence and that he therefore wished plenty of ships to be sent to trade with him."[61]

Allen and Thomson observed that since Obi Ossai laid so much store on Britain sending ships to enable him substitute legitimate trade for the slave trade, which the commissioners had explained to be immoral, it was only fair that the obi would consider his adherance to the treaty contingent on Britain's fulfillment of its terms. When the commissioners attempted to impress upon obi Ossai that the coming of ships depended upon the supply of commodities, the monarch replied that he was in a position to supply "plenty of palm oil, indigo, camwood and ivory." In any event, Obi Ossai as the chief merchant of his territories found it difficult to believe that a sovereign as powerful as Queen Victoria, could experience difficulties in sending ships to Aboh.[62] The slave trade had become the most important means of obtaining European manufactures in Aboh, and Obi Ossai knew that its abolition was doomed to failure without adequate provisions for a substitute. It was hardly any surprise therefore when the obi remarked that the "dash" i.e. gifts from Queen Victoria "were very well in their place," but he would have "preferred articles of merchandise in which he could traffic with advantage."[63]

Before long, an opportunity to test how sincere Obi Ossai was in his new policy of friendship and direct trade with the British, presented itself. The West Indian Farm Superintendent of the 1841 Expedition, Mr. Alfred Carr, had taken ill at the confluence, and returned to Fernando Po to recuperate. Upon recovery, he left for Bonny where he hired a canoe and crew to take him to the farm at Idah. But out in the Brass River, Mr. Carr disappeared in November 1841, and was never found.

In July of the following year, Lieutenant W. H. Webb was sent up the Niger in the Wilberforce to evacuate the now destitute 32 settlers left behind on the farm at Idah. He stopped at Aboh in the hope of obtaining information regarding the fate of Mr. Carr. The Obi denied any knowledge of Mr. Carr's whereabouts, adding that the farm superintendent did not come as far as Aboh or he would have known. King Boy of Nembe-Brass, who happened to be in Aboh on one of his regular trading missions, also denied any knowledge of Mr. Carr's whereabouts. On his return from the confluence, where further inquiries had proved fruitless, Lieutenant Webb made a second stop at Aboh. This time, it was King Boy who volunteered information. According to the Brass monarch, Mr. Carr had entered his river (the Brass) about "seven or eight moons" and he (Boy) had in his possession items of clothing belonging to Mr. Carr. He also had two Bassa men from whom the clothes had been recovered.[64]

At this stage, Lieutenant Webb thought he had cause to suspect King Boy of Mr. Carr's murder. In the first

place, King Boy had withheld this information on the occasion of his first visit. In the second place, King Boy, had contrary to usage, refused to come to the Wilberforce when sent for.

Even Obi Ossai was suspected of complacency in the case. For example, after he had asked Lt. Webb to send a galley for him, an attempt was made to attack it.[65] The best that the Lieutenant could do was to take as captives a messenger of Obi Ossai--Black Beard-- and two of King Boy's servants to Fernando Po. Questioned by Consul John Beecroft on July 26, Black Beard averred that Obi Ossai had nothing to do with the murder of Mr. Carr, but the Brass men confessed that the West Indian was shot by the Bassa people, and his servants sold into slavery further upstream.[66]

For sometime after this incident, Anglo-Aboh relations became strained. Lieutenant Webb was certain that Obi Ossai was implicated in the murder of Carr, and reprisal against Aboh was even suggested. As succeeding events were to reveal, Obi Ossai had been very concerned over the repercussions that Mr. Carr's death would have on the planned trade with the English. Although King Boy had nothing to do with Carr's death, Obi Ossai thought otherwise. His reaction was prompt and decisive.

An embargo was placed upon trade with Brass, and plans for an invasion of Brass was embarked upon. Since the Brass had murdered the white man coming to establish trade in Aboh, it was necessary to check further acts of violence, and to

register his disapproval of the tactics of the coastal middlemen.

For this purpose, the co-operation of the Atah of Igala was thought desirable. Mr. Richards who accompanied Consul Beecroft to Nupe in 1845 reported that Obi Ossai had

> sent to inform the Atah of Igara of the conduct of the inhabitants of the Delta who had killed the white man coming to establish trade with the upper country, and that something must be done to keep the road open for free communication between them [Aboh and Igala] and the whiteman.[67]

The Atah of Igala, not possessing the naval capabilities for such a campaign, transmitted Obi Ossai's request to Emir Dasaba of Nupe "as one concerned with the matter and powerful enough to keep the road open." Dasaba, apparently ignorant of the Delta terrain sent a large force of horse and foot soldiers to Idah where they encamped for some time at the abandoned model farm.

The Atah Igala later collected some canoes and the combined forces began the southward march. South of Adamugu, the Nupe forces commenced attacking and looting surrounding villages, but they retreated shortly after, for fear of "loosing many ... men and horses in the swamps. ..."[68] The proposed attack on Brass proved to be abortive, but it served to clear Obi Ossai of any implication in Carr's murder. It also demonstrated Obi Ossai's determination to "keep the road open for free communication," between the whitemen and the markets of the interior.

One of the objectives of the 1841 expedition was to

explore avenues for the propagation of christianity. Gospel and trade were so inextricably bound that Obi Ossai found that he could not accept trade alone without offending the white men. He was reported to have "expressed an earnest desire that teachers should be sent to him and his people." Two bibles, one Arabic and the other English, were presented to the monarch. Simon Jonas, the Igbo liberated slave, interpreted as verses were read out of the bibles to the king. He was said to have been so impressed with Jonas' knowledge that he fervently begged that Simon Jonas be allowed to remain at Aboh and begin instructing the people.

Jonas was sent back to Aboh late in September where he stayed for three weeks. He could not have achieved much, but he did report that about 2,000 children always flocked around him to learn, and that the Aboh were particularly desirous of learning.[69] Obi Ossai who had in the meantime appointed Simon Jonas to the rank of "Chief Taylor to His Excellency," was very sorry to lose him. As he bade farewell to Jonas, noted the Reverend Crowther:

> his last words were expended in impressing on their recollection, the promise they had made him, that he should have teachers and pleading for its speedy fulfillment.[70]

Later events proved that Obi Ossai's policy was ill-conceived, and that his kingdom's interest would have been better served by a solid alliance with the Bonny and Brass who had already coalesced against European intrusion in the Niger Valley.[71] Obi Ossai was naive enough to believe that the authority he exercised over his people as well as over a

considerable stretch of the Niger Valley was sufficient to stop British merchants from making similar overtures to the chiefs and rulers further up the River.

Although his policy was misguided, Obi Ossai's political authority within and outside Aboh was real. The 1841 Expedition was informed that the obi's position was that of a constitutional monarch, resting upon a council of headmen, but Obi Ossai repeatedly told the visitors that he was absolute. He was reported to have boasted that his eldest son Chukwumah would succeed him, and that his orders would be carried out even after his death.[72] Although his assertions were clearly against usage, all the headmen present on the occasion nodded assent. When the commissioners sought to know if he was invested with full powers to conclude a treaty with Britain on behalf of his people, Obi Ossai's response was unequivocal: "I am the king - what I say is law - are there two kings in England? Here there is only one."[73] A man of unusual firmness and possessed of a perceptive mind, Obi Ossai commanded the unalloyed obedience of his subjects. "His manner," wrote Captain Henry Trotter, "though friendly and unceremonious showed a consciousness of power, and his attendants treated him with marked respect."[74]

Obi Ossai coupled his prepossessing appearance with a firmness which struck early visitors to Aboh. One excellent example of this aspect of his character was thought sufficiently striking to be recorded by Dr. MacWilliam of the Expedition of 1841. He had been amusing Aje, the king's

brother and other "headmen" with an instrument fitted to give shocks. The Chief Judge Amorama, had been severely shocked and refused to come near the instrument, while the others looked from a distance with intense suspicion and fear. Even Obi Ossai stopped doubtingly, but according to Dr. MacWilliam,

> he seemed determined to show no signs of irresolution or fear before his people. He took a firm grip of the cylinders, and held them upwards of a minute although I could perceive the muscles of the shoulders and chest in strong electric excitation.[75]

Thus, oral traditions probably never exaggerated in claiming Obi Ossai to be one of the most powerful and militaristic monarch to have occupied the throne. Unfortunately, few of the many wars that were fought at this time are preserved in the traditions. One account said they were small scale wars which nevertheless succeeded in enlarging Obi Ossai's sovereign power, for were there any large scale wars, the details would have been preserved.

One such battle, confirmed by oral traditions, was recorded by R. A. K. Oldfield in 1832. The conflict must be dated to late 1831 or early 1832 for Oldfield who reported it in 1832 mentioned that the obi was still at variance with Asaba.

One of Obi Ossai's sons had been murdered in the market at Asaba, for reasons which are not stated. It seems safe however to assume that the incident occured in the course of a trade dispute. In revenge, Obi Ossai despatched "a powerful fleet of war canoes" to attack Asaba. The town

was taken, and sacked, and the Aboh succeeded in carrying away "two hundred prisoners whose heads were out off and exposed in the market place".

That this conflict in which the Asabans were overwhelmed actually took place is borne out by the fact that when in 1832 Oldfield stopped at Asaba, "his majesty, and his people ... abandoned the town and fled into the bush." They had been under the suspicion that Oldfield came to take them prisoners to Obi Ossai.[76] Again, shortly before his death, another relative of his was murdered at Akra Atani, and the Obi, it was reported "took sanguinary vengeance" against this village.[77]

The extent of the kingdom during the reign of Obi Ossai may never be accurately determined. Aboh traditions merely assert that the kingdom reached its zenith in both extent and effective administration under him.[78] Neither before nor after Obi Ossai did Aboh rise to such glorious heights. Expeditions to the Niger valley reported that Obi Ossai was much "respected and feared throughout the Lower Niger."[79] That Aboh kings were in the past elected by "sixty elders or chiefs of large villages" is clearly indicative of an "empire" type structure. But the analogy must not be over-stretched. A. C. Ryder has drawn attention to the fact that there is a danger inherent in applying such western concepts as "empire" to African conditions without careful qualifications.[80] Professor Robert July has also examined in greater detail, the levels of authority in African "empires".[81]

Thus, the use of the term "empire" in this context should not be interpreted literarily. Perhaps, the term "sphere of influence" would be far more appropriate.

Each town under the jurisdiction of Obi Ossai had a "headman" who was responsible to him and council at Aboh for the proper regulation of his district. Each town also had ajudge whose duty it was to settle disputes and pass sentences, subject to the confirmation of the chief. In "extreme cases, the affair is referred to the Council at Aboh".[82] The manner in which these "headmen" were appointed is not known. Allen guessed that the tributary villages were held as fiefs by the principal chiefs at Aboh, but this is highly conjectural and not confirmed by evidence from outside Aboh. The chiefs of Oko and Onya were reported to be "brothers" of Obi Ossai, but it is not known whether these and any others had been appointed by the monarch.

The territorial chiefs paid tribute in yams, fish, and perhaps slaves, who were meant to be personal servants of the king. But Obi Ossai drew upon their resources in times of war. He himself has fifteen war canoes besides those contributed by Aboh headmen, but when

> he wants to make 'a great war', he sends to all the chiefs who are tributary to him, and they furnished armed canoes according to their means and the size of the villages under their authority - some four, some only one canoe each.[83]

An Aboh chief was appointed to command the entire fleet which, on extraordinary occasions, numbered about 300 canoes, all

"armed with swivels and muskets.[84]

The extent of the territory under his political control must therefore have been quite considerable. According to Captain Allen and Thomson, "no independent chief intervened between Ibu [Aboh] and the king of Eggarah".[85] More concretely, Obi Ossai's sovereignty

> is acknowledged for about fifty-five miles along both sides of the river, Oniah [Onya] being his lowest village on the right bank near the Benin branch; Owiah Okbe, the highest. On the left bank, from Ipatani upwards to Akra-Atan, near the Onecha River and all the villages included in these.[86]

It is of some significance that thirteen years after Allen wrote these lines, Simon Jonas who spent three months travelling widely through Aboh and the neighbourhood, asserted that Onitsha and Asaba "were about the limits of the Aboh territory".[87] The more critical Hutchinson who did not think Aboh power extended far inland confirmed the boundaries sketched by Allen, adding that Oko was "tributary to Aboh."[88] According to Baikie, the town of Ossomari, Nsugbe and Anam, north of Onitsha also paid tribute to Obi Ossai.[89]

How far beyond the Niger Obi Ossai's influence extended is a matter of conjecture. Aboh traditions say that the Obi controlled much of Ukwuani country as far away as Obiaruku on the Ethiope.[90] Writing in 1926, P. A. Talbot noted that "the most powerful king in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was the Obi of Abaw, a town which assumed great importance as the principal trading depot on the Niger, and ruled over the whole of the Kwale Ibo and of the other Ika

as far north as Asaba".[91] Early in 1928 when the issue of the extent of the sovereignty of the Obi of Aboh came up for discussion, Oba Eweka II of Benin asserted that in the past, the Obi of Aboh and the Oba of Benin shared a common boundary at the Eli River i.e. River Adofi.[92] Although it is not certain what time Oba Eweka meant, it is significant that the towns included in the country he describes as ruled by the Obi of Aboh were listed in 1854 by Dr. W. B. Baikie as "belonging" to Aboh. These were Oko-ala, Igbuku, Ashaka, Utagba, Afor, Ibredi, and Anyama[93].

The oral traditions of some of the Ukwuani villages, although containing no indication of time, might be said to offer some corroborative evidence. In 1928, the Okpala uku of Umuebu about five miles south of Abraka told the District Officer Mr. E. A. Chadwick that "the Obi of Aboh used to take their strongest men to form part of his body guard".[94] The Ogume were reported to have said that they were "junior brothers" of the Aboh, and that their national festivals - <u>iduku ogume Aboh</u> - was never begun until permission had been issued by the Obi of Aboh.[95] The Akoko people, deep inside Ukuani country acknowledged the sovereignty of the Obi of Aboh, and elected to be placed under his rule in the local government reorganization of the 1920s[96]. At a clan meeting, Abbi elders told Assistant District Officer, J. B. Mackay that "the Obi of Aboh used to rule all this country,"[97] and at Amai, a variant tradition says that the

village had been established by the Obi to guard his northern frontiers.[98]

It is doubtdul if more than a handful of these villages were brought within the fold of the Obi by conquest. The traditions of most Ukwuani villages tell of migrations from Aboh.[99] There is little doubt that these emigrants and their descendants continued to be religiously tied to the Obi of Aboh. Thus, we hear that at Orogun, the Nze family, who were the custodians of the ofo of Orogun, previously sent their leader to Aboh to obtain the title of Eze (King) from the Obi.[100]

There is some evidence that the influence of the Obi was felt beyond the confines of present day Aboh Division. Here again, the oral traditions of the various peoples provide some clue. The ovie of Abraka, a town now in the Urhobo Division, was in the past invested on the Urua-ovie lineage head of Abraka who had to go to Aboh to receive the title from the Obi.[101] According to Professor R. E. Bradbury, the ovie of the Isoko town of Elu was crowned by the Obi of Aboh in return for a fee to the value of £70, and was given "a hat, an iron ofo stick and a red coat".[102] The Okpe-Isoko and Ozoro kings also received their titles from the Obi of Aboh.[103] It might be noted in passing that the Uzoro case came up for testing in 1933 when Obi Oputa invested Chief Okonedo with the title of Ovie of Uzoro at Aboh. Although the act was decried by Okonedo's rivals, Obi Oputa claimed that his predecessor, Obi Imegwu,

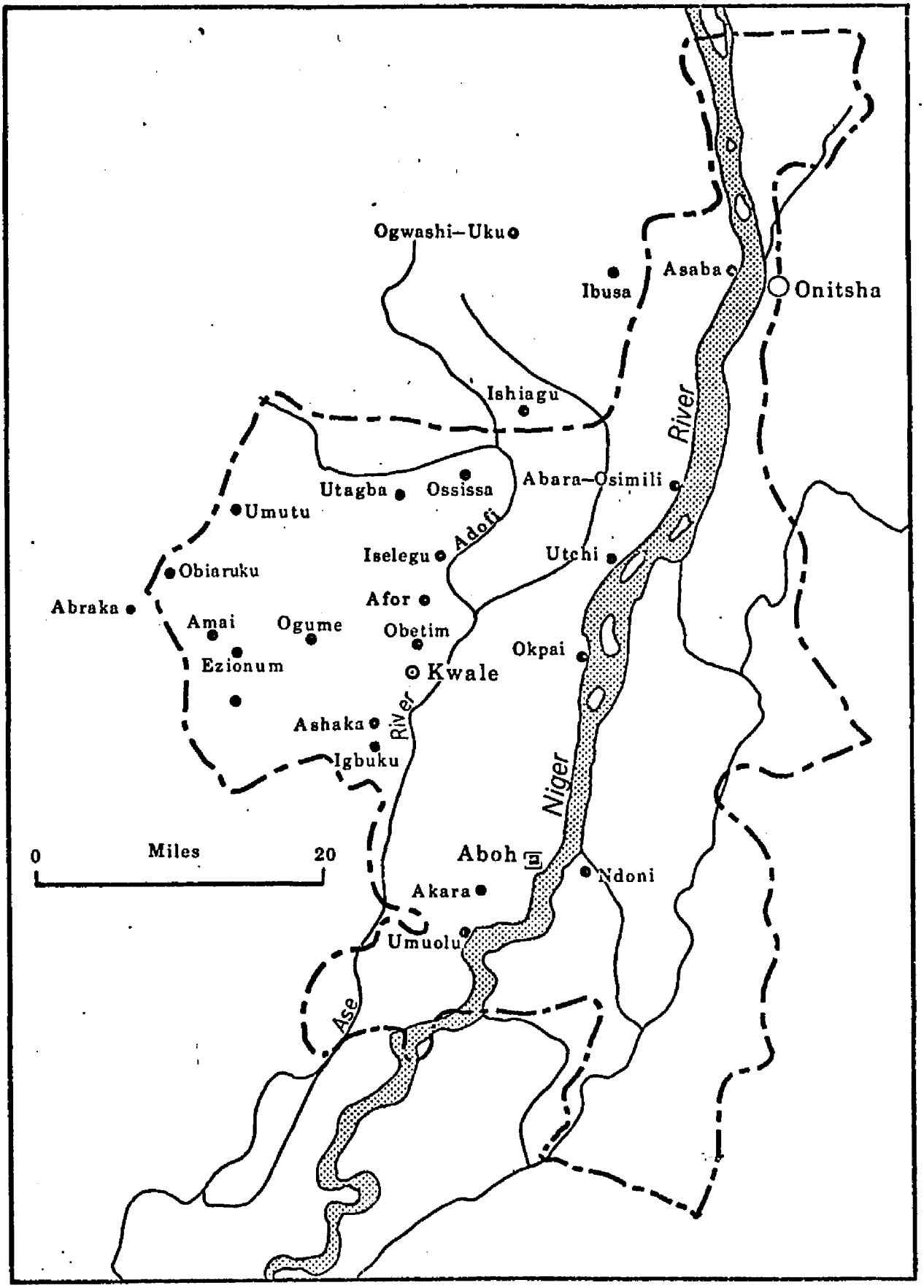


Fig. 12. Probable Limits of the Territory under the Influence of the Obi of Aboh during the first half of the nineteenth century.

did crown an Uzoro ovie (i.e. in the 1880's). Okonedo's supporters asserted that before the innauguration of British rule, uzoro was "under Aboh for Ovie, and same was going up to date."[104]

There is one strong indication that at least the Niger as far as Asaba was under Obi Ossai's sovereignty. The Landers, it must be recollected had been attacked near Asaba by war canoes from Aboh. At a "palavar" held the next day, the explorers were told by the "council" in which a good number of "mohammedans" (traders from the North) were represented,

> to consider themselves prisoners, and consent to be conducted ... to Obie, King of Eboe country whose will and pleasure concerning [themselves] would then be explained.[105]

It is suggested that if Obi Ossai had no jurisdiction over Asaba, the decision to send the visitors to Aboh would have been difficult to comprehend. The Obi actually laid claim to Onitsha although he added that the people had been rebellious of late, and that as long as any of his children lived, they would always fight against Onitsha.[106]

Obi Ossai maintained his authority over such a far-flung territory, not only by conquest, but by judicious diplomacy. To keep tributary villages under control, and also to assure the uninterrupted flow of trade commodities, Obi Ossai linked the Aboh royal house with the tributary villages by marriage.

> "The amount of Obi's harem", notes Allen, "adds also to his power; for by obtaining the daughters of the headmen of neighbouring villages, he secures an interest

> there, and thus his influence may be said to be in proportion to the number of wives, of which he had at present about one hundred, ..."[107]

After all is said and done, the territories described as falling under the influence of Obi Ossai must be conceived of only in informal terms. Only the areas within easy reach of the Obi's seat at Aboh ever came under any direct supervision of the Obi and his headmen. The authority of the Obi for regions far afield meant very little more than an annual tribute, and an occasional visit to Aboh. It also meant that Aboh merchants were guaranteed safety and some preferences in the markets of the "tributary villages".

Powerful, and sometimes absolutist, Obi Ossai was (to judge from the scattered evidence of his reign) exceptionally kind and ordinarily good natured. These aspects of his nature endeared him to the hearts of his subjects. According to Allen and Thomson, Obi Ossai's

> force of character, superior judgement, as well as his mild and equitable administration of justice may have invested him with the additional influence of public opinion. All appear to look on him with great reverence ....[108]

The cordial treatment he extended to the Lander brothers on the occasion of the latter's stay at Aboh is evidence of his magnanimous bearing. That he shrewedly bargained with King Boy to obtain a ransom for their release should not be construed to mean the "sale" of the Landers. Obi Ossai was not so naive as to believe that Europeans would purchase their like at the coast. According to John Lander himself, the monarch had been induced to take a strong stand on the

issue "from the eagerness which has been displayed by the Bonny and Brass people to take us to their respective countries".[109] The Obi naturally imagined that if both parties did not expect to be heavily compensated, there would not be such a wrangle over the prisoners. In the end, he released the Landers to King Boy "for as much English goods as would amount to twenty slaves". It is also possible that he was influenced by the desire to send the Landers through the actual mouth of the Niger. He had himself told the Landers that the Bonny creek, inspite of the claim of the people from Bonny, was dried up, and that in order to get to Bonny, it was necessary to go to Brass first.[110]

Obi Ossai was equally free with presents, and no doubt won many friends for himself by his acts of generosity. He was particularly liberal with beverages.

> "It is the custom of the principal people of the town", we are told, "to wait on him [Obi Ossai] every morning in several divisions, each of which comprises six persons, and each party receives a bottle of rum."[111]

It is little wonder then that Obi Ossai has gone down in Aboh vocabulary as Obi ukwu, which translates as "great Obi", or in better phraseology Ossai the Great.

Yet the bitterness of the years before he succeeded Obi Ugboma, when his junior brother Ajie joined contest with him, never quite mellowed. When he died in December 1844, it was with an injunction to his children not to return to Ogbuku from whence he had come, some twenty years earlier to

Plate IV. Obi Ossai I of Aboh

occupy the throne.[112] On the other hand, this injunction which tradition talks about might be a rationalization of the fact his sons had already founded flourishing compounds in the vicinity of the palace, and could not be expected to uproot themselves and return to Ogbuku where they owned no houses. In any case, his children and their descendants settled permanently close by the palace in the sector which still bears the monarchs name - Onuobikwu i.e. "the sector of the great Obi".

Trade with European which formed the cornerstone of his policy did not materialize in his lifetime. Nothing came of his newly found friendship with the whitemen, but he continued to believe in the righteousness of this path, even on his death bed. He was said to have left an injunction to his successor to cotinue in his footsteps. Chukwumah, his eldest son, told the expedition led to Aboh by Dr. W. B. Baikie, that

> he and other headmen were particularly charged by Obi, before his death,not to deviate from the path he had trod, respecting his friendship with the whitemen.[113]

In this chapter, the early political and economic development of the kingdom of Aboh has been explored with the aid of oral data. One of the main threads in this development is Aboh's participation in long distance trade to the north, and an increasing importance as an inland port of trade. The reign of Obi Ossai which terminated in 1844 and for which oral evidence becomes greatly supplemented by documented evidence indicates that the Aboh

were initiating a new policy with regard to trade--a desire for direct communication with Europeans instead of the existing middleman pattern. It has also been found that the Aboh kingdom reached its apogee politically during the first half of the nineteenth century, when its "empire" embraced much of Ukwuani country, and the Lower Niger as far as Onitsha and beyond. In the next chapter, attention will be diverted to an analysis of the trade wheel of the Lower Niger in which the market at Aboh formed but one important cog.

NOTES

[1]Supra, p. 209, note also an earlier reference to Mr. F. E. Chukwuma, who dates Obi Essumei's reign to the eighteenth century, (See footnote 92, Chap. Four).

[2]Interview with No. 4 in Appendix A, Aboh, April, 1970.

[3]There was only one case of an individual who traced his descent from Obi Chiegwi, but after about eight generational counts, he was unable to tell the exact connection between Chiegwe and the upper levels of affiliation.

[4]Interview with No. 8, in Appendix A, Ashaka, Jan. 1970 See also Obi, op. cit., pp. 31-2.

[5]Obi, op. cit., p. 29.

[6]Interview with No. 26, in Appendix A, Aboh, April, 1970. Also Obi op. cit., pp. 40-41.

[7]Interview with No. 4, in Appendix A, Aboh, April, 1970.

[8]Hubbard, op. cit., p. 82.

[9]Interview with No. 4, in Appendix A, Aboh, April, 1970.

[10]Supra, pp. 207-209

[11]The Aboh believe so strongly in the efficacy of Obi Ugbo's curse that sometime in 1966, the Aboh Union decided to invite Ugbo's descendants who are scattered all over Ukwuani to a "reconcilliation" meeting, but nothing came of the movement.

[12]Obi, op. cit., p. 24. Note also that traditions collected at Obiaruku corroborates the Aboh version. There exists to this day at Obiaruku a sector known as Umusuma (UmuessumaiP, that is "Children of Essumei" who regard themselves as Aboh.

[13]Interview with No. 4, in Appendix A, Aboh, April, 1970.

[14]Obi, op. cit., pp. 24-5.

[15]Lander and Lander, op. cit., 2, p. 216. The writer saw the tank in question. They do not seem to have been imported, being a little too crude, and made of bronze. But whether or not it was manufactured by local black and brass smiths is another question.

[16]Interview with No. 4, in Appendix A, Aboh April, 1970. See Supra, pp.126-127 for a list of Aboh titles.

[17]Interview with No. 4, in Appendix A, Aboh, April 1970.

[18]Obi, op. cit., pp. 26-7.

[19]Ibid., p. 27.

[20]Ibid., p. 35. Also interview with No. 20, in Appendix A, Aboh, March 1970.

[21]C.S.O. 26/3, File No. 26769. Williams, "A Report on the Ibo speaking clans of the Kwale Division," p. 8.

[22]Kwale District, File No. 42/1928.

[23]Interview with No. 4, in Appendix A, Aboh March 1970.

[24]Lander and Lander, op. cit., 2, p. 213.

[25]A. C. Hastings, The Voyage of the Dayspring (London, 1926), p. 77; Lady Glover, Life of Sir John Hawley Glover (London, 1897), p. 54.

[26]Allen and Thomson, op. cit., 1, p. 204.

[27]Sir W. J. Hooker, Niger Flora, Enumeration of Plants Collected by Dr. Vogel in Captain Trotter's Expedition of 1841 ...." (London, 1849), p. 55.

[28]Dike, op. cit., pp. 26-7.

[29]See for example, Dike, op. cit., p. 41.

[30]P. D. Curtin, The Image of Africa, (Madison, 1964), p. 462. According to Curtin, Aboh "was strategically placed to control the passage of goods up and down the river, and it was also in a position to exert pressure on the non-food producing delta towns by cutting of their food imports."

[31]Dike, op. cit., The Entire study is as much an examination of the middleman system of trade as it is the study of the involvement of Europeans in the politics of trade in the Delta city states. See also J. E. Flint, Sir. George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria (London, 1960), pp. 9-33.

[32]Supra, pp. 4-6, discusses the environmental background.

[33]The potentials of the Niger River for trade reached the new world, where some Americans from Rhode Island actually equipped an expedition to trade for oil in Aboh in 1832. Like the British expedition, it too proved a dismal failure. See Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., I, pp. 344-348.

[34]C. C. Ifemesia, "British Enterprise on the Niger, 1830-1869", (Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of London, 1959), p. 33.

[35]The family of Macgregor Laird owned about 25 percent of the total share of the AICC. His father's ship building firm of William Laird and sons constructed the first iron steam vessel ever to sail the ocdans - The Alburkah - which was used in the expedition. Alburkah is Arabic for "Blessing". The other vessels of the expedition were the Quorra (shining water), and the Columbine, a sailing vessel. The expedition left Liverpool harbour on July 19, 1832 and reached the Nun bar on October 20, 1832. The commander of the expedition was Richard Lander, and he was assisted by Captain R. A. K. Oldfield.

Disease and death were the greatest problems the expedition had to contend with. Thus, of the forty-eight Europeans who entered the Niger, only eight survived the expedition. See summary of personnel and casualities in Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., II, pp. 282-287, 293, 334-342.

[36]Dike, op. cit., p. 63.

[37]Ibid.

[38]See Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., 2 vols. Both volumes are actually devoted to trade in the interior.

[39]Laird's strategy, when in full operation should look like this. A steamer filled with empty puncheons or casks of oil and an assortment of manufactured goods should make a direct passage to Aboh. The steamer would then "land the trade puncheons to be filled with oil, and proceed immediately to Attah (Igala) and Iccory (Kiri)" for about three weeks. On arrival at Aboh, the steam vessel "would receive and pay for the oil that had been collected, emptying it in bulk into the hold (of the steamer), leaving the puncheons to be refilled". She then returns to the other vessels waiting on the coast and into these, the oil is pumped.

Laird went on to argue against the theory that such a system of trade would destroy the Delta economy. It would he said stimulate the Delta chieftains to collect oil in the areas b below Aboh. "Trading direct with Eboe will have the effect of making these people collect oil, and become competitors with Eboe, upon who industry they now subsist." Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., I, pp. 103-4; Also Vol. II, pp. 403-6.

[40]Allen and Thomson, op. cit., 2, pp. 239-40.

[41]Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., 1, p. 101.

[42]William Simpson, A Private Journal Kept During the Niger Expedition (London, 1843), p. 41.

[43]Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., 1, p. 101.

[44]Lander and Lander, op. cit., 2, p. 213.

[45]Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., 1, p. 101.

[46]Ifemesis, op. cit., pp. 258-9.

[47]Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., 1, p. 270.

[48]Ibid.

[49]Ibid., p. 97.

[50]C.O. 82/9. Encl. to Lt. Col. Edward Nicolls, Feb. 28, 1836. Account of Beecroft's Expedition up the Niger River on the Quorra, Sept. 1835.

[51]Ibid.

[52]See Thomas Fowell Buxton's main anti-slavery work, The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy (London, 1839. Buxton had raid Macgregor Laird's journals on the potentialities of the Niger Valley, and had written to Laird concerning the "new light in which his voyage had placed the subject of the slave trade. Buxton's remedy for the ever increasing trade in slaves despite the efforts of the navy etc., was to induce the British Government into an all out effort to negotiate treaties with the Chiefs of the interior, particularly those situated along the banks of the Niger. These should be persuaded to stop the slave trade, and instead, employ their men in the production of raw materials.

"If instead of our expensive and fruitless negotiations with Portugal", Buxton wrote, "we had been ... engaged in extending our intercourse with the nations of Africa, unfolding to them, the capabilities of her soil, and the inexhaustible store of wealth which human labour might derive from its cultivation, and convincing them that the slave trade along debars them from enjoying a vastly more affluent supply of our valuable commodities, and if we had leagued ourselves with them to suppress this baneful traffic, ... there is reason to believe that Africa would not have been what it is inspite of all our exertions."

The new approach required the acquisition of land in the interior, for British commercial enterprise, as well as the establishment of christian missionaries.

[53]There were four ships in this mission, the Albert, the Sondan, Harriot, and the Wilberforce. The expedition was under the command of Captain Henry D. Trotter, R. N. and the other commissioners were Commander William Allen, Commander Bird Allen and Commander William Cook.

Their mission was to establish friendly relations with the Chiefs of the Niger and its tributaries, to induce them to stop the foreign slave trade and to substitute in its place, legitimate trade with the British. In addition, the commissioners were to negotiate the purchase of land for the erection of forts on the Niger, if this was found to be necessary. They were also to inquire as to the custom of domestic servitude in each of the inland kingdoms, and to collect "the most accurate" information regarding "the extent of the possession of each chief .. his influence beyond these possessions ... the numbers and condition of the army ... and what are the further military and financial resources of the chief ...."

See C.O. 2/24 No. I. Papers relative to the Expedition to the River Niger, John Russell to the Lord Commissioners of Her Majesty's Treasury, Dec. 26, 1839.

[54]The 1841 Treaty between Obi Ossai I and the British Government is reproduced in Appendix C.

[55]Allen and Thomson, op. cit., p. 230.

[56]C.O. 2/24, No. 55. W. Cook, Es. Fourth Commissioner to Lord Stanley, March 11, 1843.

[57]Schon and Crowther, op. cit., p. 54.

[58]Ibid., p. 70.

[59]Ibid., p. 58.

[60]C.O. 2/24. No. 54. Minutes of the Proceedings of the Commissioners of the Niger expedition, 1841-2, Minute No. 4, Interview at Aboh, August 26, 1841.

[61]C.O. 2/24, No. 23, Despatch from Her Majesty's Commissioners to Lord John Russel, Aug. 30, 1841.

[62]Ibid.

[63]Simpson, op. cit., p. 44.

[64]C.O. 2/24. Encl. in No. 46. Sir John Barrow to G. W. Hope, Dec., 10, 1842.

[65]Ibid.

[66]Ibid.

[67]Crowther, Journal of an Expedition, p. 39. According to Baikie who also reported this incident, Obi Ossai "sent to Attah to acquaint him of it, saying it was very unfortunate

and would injure their prospects of trading with white men ...." Baikie, op. cit., p. 302.

[68]Crowther, Journal of An Expedition, p. 39.

[69]The Church Missionary Intelligencer, Vol. VIII, 1857, p. 193.

[70]Ibid.

[71]Ifemesia, op. cit., pp. 258-9.

[72]C.O. 2/24. No. 53. William Allen to Lord Stanley, Feb. 5, 1843.

[73]C.O. 2/24. No. 54. Minutes of the Proceedings of the Commissioners of the Niger Expedition, 1841-2, Minute No. 4, Interview at Aboh, August 26, 1841.

[74]C.O. 2/24, No. 52. Captain Trotter to Lord Stanley, March 15, 1843.

[75]James MacWilliam, Medical History of the Expedition to the Niger During the Years 1841-2 (London, 1843), p. 64.

[76]Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., 2, p. 139.

[77]Allen and Thomson, op. cit., 1, p. 269.

[78]Interview with No. 8, in Appendix A, Ashaka, January, 1970, See also Obi, op. cit., p. 65.

[79]MacWilliam, op. cit., p. 64.

[80]Ryder, op. cit., p. 21.

[81]Robert July, History of the African People (New York, 1970), pp. 60-61. I am also indebted to Dr. T. N. Tamuno who drew my attention to this problem during a brief but fruitful discussion at Ibadan.

If "imperial" authority were defined in the western sense of a well defined boundary within which the central figure or organ exercised effective power over an extended period, then quite obviously, few African polities qualify as "empires". For example, the Bini claim that the "Empire" extended over much of Yoruba country, and even east across the Niger into Igbo country, but there exists no indication of how effective this rule was, or even how government was carried on in these outlying regions.

The Aboh claim to have been under the rule of the Oba of Benin, but none of the many expeditions to the Niger mentioned this fact.

[82]Allen and Thomson, op. cit., 1, p. 235.

[83]Ibid., p. 236.

[84]Ibid.

[85]C.O. 2/24. No. 53. Captain William Allen to Lord Stanley, Feb. 5. 1843.

[86]Allen and Thomson, op. cit., 1, p. 233.

[87]Crowther, Journal of An Expedition, p. 187.

[88]T. Hutchinson, Narrative of the Niger, Tshadda and Benue Expedition (London, 1855), p. 171
Wrote Hutchinson, "At Onitsha on the left side of the river the Aboh territory terminates, and the Egarrah country commences ... on the opposite side Asabaa terminates the Aboh Kingdom, which stretches from the Benin Creek, coming from the Waree country to this place, a distance of about sixty miles."

[89]Baikie, op. cit., p. 293.

[90]Obi, op. cit., p. 65.

[91]Talbot, op. cit., 3, pp. 592-3.

[92]Kwale District 5, File No. ANA 39. D. O. Kwale to D. O. Benin, Feb. 29, 1928, See also Appendix C.

[93]Baikie op. cit., p. 293, and p. 300.

[94]Kwale District 2, File NO. ANA 39, Chadwick to District Officer, Kwale, Dec. 15, 1928.

[95]Ibid.

[96]Ibid.

[97]Ibid.

[98]Ibid.

[99]For example, the Abbedei claim to have emigrated from Ogbe Isemele in Umuogwezi Aboh; Chief Anoka of Ogume said that Ogume was an off-shoot of Aboh; Amai is said to have been established as a watchpost of the northwestern frontiers of the Aboh territories. See also Chapter Two on Igbo antecedents, particularly map on the peopling of southern Ika. Also Forde and Jones, op. cit., pp. 48-9.

[100]Kwale District File No. 4/10, Assistant D.O. to District Officer, Kwale, May 28, 1930.

[101]Kwale District, 4/2, File E. 48/22. District Officer to Resident, October 10, 1922, also Kwale District 5, File No. ANA 39, E. R. Chadwick to District Officer, Kwale, Dec. 15, 1928.

[102]Bradbury, The Benin Kingdom and the Edo-Speaking Peoples of South western Nigeria (London, 1964), p. 146. See also Kwale District 4/8, File No. K. 167/1928, D.O. to Resident, Oct. 22, 1928.

[103]Ibid. Bradbury notes that "those tribes whose ivie got their titles from the Obi of Aboh are all in the eastern part of the area far removed from Benin."

[104]Kwale District 5, File No. ANA 39. Petition from Oletu Ubuluku and senior odion Esagha on behalf of the Uzoro People to D.O. Kwale, Dec. 20, 1933. See also D.O. Kwale to D.O. Warri, May 19, 1932 where Obi Oputa claimed that his predecessor Obi Imegu had actually crowned a member of Okenedo's family as ovie of Uzoro in the 1880s.

[105]Lander and Lander, op. cit., 2, p. 196.

[106]Talbot, op. cit., 1, p. 234. Also Meek, op. cit., p. 13.

[107]Allen and Thomson, op. cit., I, p. 204.

[108]Ibid., p. 234.

[109]Lander and Lander, op. cit., 2, p. 220.

[110]Ibid., p. 221.

[111]Schon and Crowther, op. cit., p. 232.

[112]Interview with No. 19, in Appendix A, Aboh March, 1970.

[113]Crowther, Journal of An Expedition, p. 18.

CHAPTER SIX

THE TRADING SYSTEM OF THE NIGER VALLEY

In the preceeding chapter, attention was drawn to the prevailing but erroneous notion that the regions behind the Atlantic coast, were simply "areas of production", where little else took place beyond a frantic effort to 'supply' the coastal middlemen traders with commodities for their European patrons. Undoubtedly, great changes occurred in both the volume and level of organization of the trade of the Niger Valley as a result of the overseas trade with Europe. But there appears to be two dangers in the concept of an "interior area of production". First, it leaves the impression, that little or no economic interaction existed between the coastal peoples and the Niger Valley before the advent of Europeans, and the great demand for African slaves and produce, which suddenly turned the interior into a 'mill'. Second, the expression obscures a proper perspective of the inter-dependence of both regions. The interior peoples not only 'supplied', they also 'received' an array of necessary items.

This preliminary observation has been emphasized, for with the exception perhaps of Igbo country east of the Niger, the Ijo middleman, who came into the river Niger, had little contact with the actual producers of most of the commodities they purchased. Such Niger Valley markets as Aboh, Ndoni, Ossomari, Onitsha, Asaba and Idah, which they visited very often, were only ports of trade which served as receiving centers for a wider network of trade in the country surrounding them. The simplest commodity or article of trade often passed through several hands and several stages of transaction before eventually reaching these inland ports of trade. Thus, the coastal middlemen had in the majority of cases, to deal with 'middlemen' not producers.

The city of Aboh was both the political center of the kingdom, as well as its principal port of trade. It is however, important not to view its latter role in isolation but as part of the Niger Valley market system which stretched as far north as the confluence and beyond.

Whatever special status it enjoyed in this system was primarily owing to its location at the apex of the

Delta, with creeks leading to Benin and the Itsekiri communities to the west, Brass in the central region, and Bonny and Kalabari in the Eastern Delta.

Aboh trade consisted of import by sea, export by sea and trade of African destination. Under import trade by sea were all manufactured goods and cowries, entering the port of Aboh from the coast. The more common of these were salt, Manchester and Indian cloth of assorted colours, used items of clothing (usually army and navy uniforms), snuff boxes, hooks, hats, looking glasses and handkerchiefs. Others were beads, rum, tumblers, muskets (guns) and powder. The export trade by sea were initially in slaves, and later palm oil. Under the category of local trade were such items as foodstuff - yams, beans and rice, poultry, brass, canoes, ivory, thatches for buildings, copper pipe bowls, etc. Commodities in the latter category were either import or export, and most were imported for resale, e.g. dogs, fowls and horses.

The import and export trade by sea accounted for the greater proportion of the value of Aboh trade. They

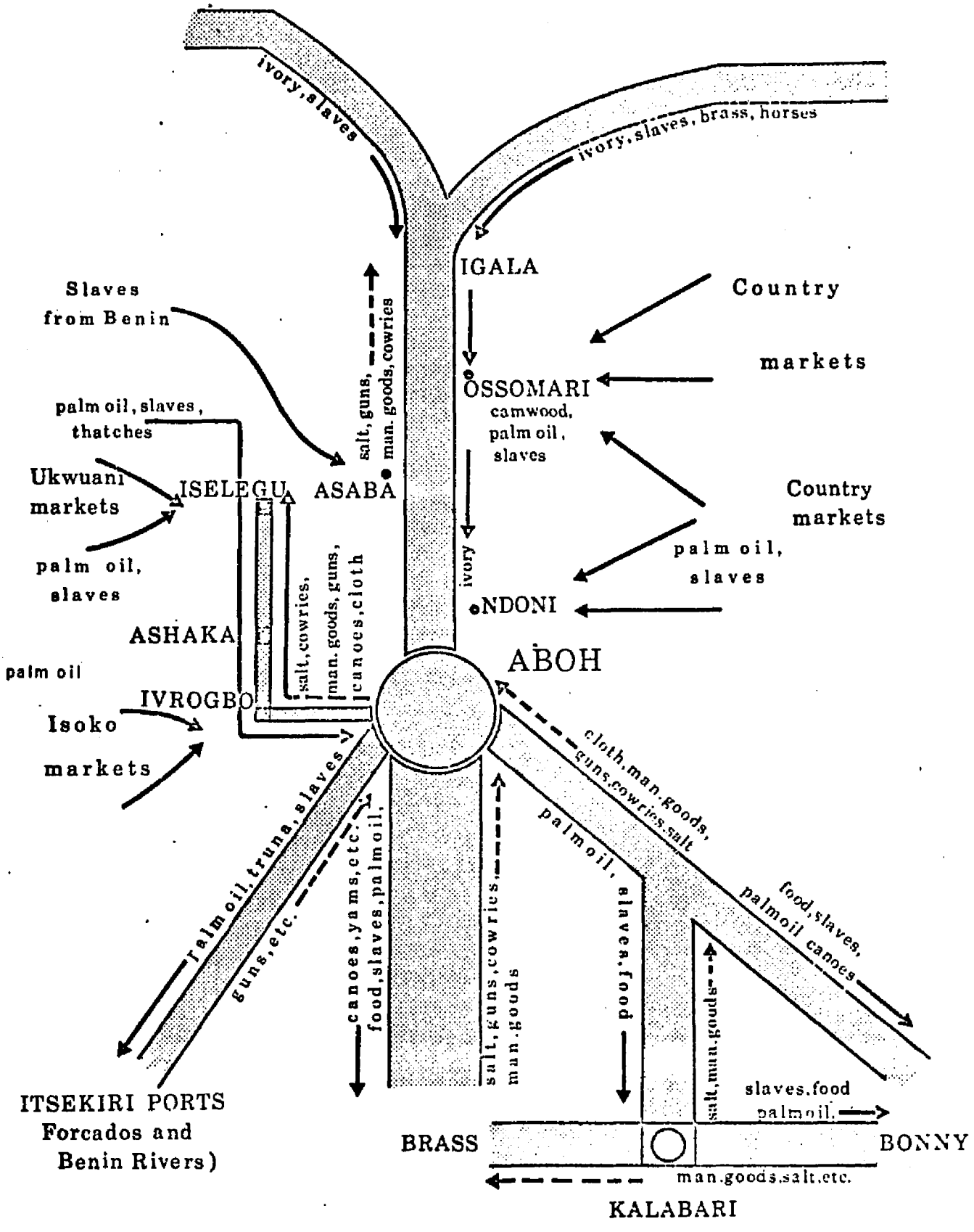


Fig. 13. Trade Chart of the Lower Niger

served to link Aboh and the other markets of the Niger Valley to the coast, and by implication to the international market.

II

Trade in Foodstuff and other Commodities

Although a great profit was derived from the import and export commodities, trade in foodstuff and other small items was of great importance. Long before the emergence of Europeans on the Guinea Coast, the web of commercial ties described as spanning the Delta and the Niger Valley, involved its peoples in an exchange of foodstuff. Dr. E. J. Alagoa has recently suggested that this earlier network of trade provided the stimulus for change and state formation in the Delta, and that the overseas trade was merely grafted onto this foundation.[1]

The pattern of this trade was dictated by ecological factors. The swamps of the Niger Delta were unsuited to agriculture. Consequently, the Ijo and Itsekiri were disposed to trade with the drier regions to the north for

their supply of most food items. Before the era of European trade, the coastal peoples were engaged mainly in the manufacture of salt and fishing. A Portuguese publication of the late fifteenth century, the Esmeraldo de situ orbis, described an Ijo village of some 2,000 persons on the Rio Real estuary (Bonny?) engaged in the manufacture of salt and exchanging this for slaves, bullocks, goats, and sheep from the hinterland.[2] Further west, in the Itsekiri country of the Forcados and Benin branch of the Niger, Captain Adams reported that:

> neptunes of large brass pans are used during the dry season for the purpose of evaporating sea-water to obtain salt... and a great trade is carried on in this article with the interior country.[3]

Although Captain Adams wrote at the close of the eighteenth century, the industry he described was doubtlessly of considerably long standing, and trade between the Itsekiri and the interior equally old.

It is not possible to obtain a full list of all the items exchanged between the Aboh and the coastal communities. Akarai traditions assert that trade with the Ijo was the mainstay of their economy before the "coming of the Aboh," and that they traded yams and vegetable produce in return for salt, pots and other small items. The Nembe-Brass, with whom the Aboh were later to establish close commercial relations, are said to have learnt the technique of salt-making from the Bassan Ijo of the central Delta.[4] By the beginning of the nineteenth century, salt-making had become the principal occupation of Brass, who were reported by Richard Lander to be

carrying large quantities of it to Aboh where it was exchanged for yams.[5] In 1832, Macgregor Laird noted that Brass country "was depended upon the Eboe [Aboh] country for their subsistence; all their yasm, bananas, plantains, and cassava (manioc) are derived from there." The Aboh he further noted rear bullocks of a small breed, goats, and fowls, all of which were bartered with the natives of Bonny, Brass and Benin.[6] Trade in foodstuff was considerable in volume, and high in value for in 1841, Captain William Allen was told that:

> "The king of Brass has eighteen large canoes, with forty men in each, which he sends to Aboh for palm-oil, yams, fowls, bullocks, goats, sheep, rice and black beans, in exchange for which he gives rum cowries, cloths, shirts, hats, caps, knives, looking-glasses, snuff-boxes, hooks and lines, scissors, muskets, powder and ball, tumblers, wine glasses, etc."[7]

It should be stressed that the overseas slave trade brought about great changes in the trade in food items and could conceivably have made it as profitable as the slave trade itself. The general increase in the demand for slaves was reflected in a corresponding increase in the demand for foodstuff with which the slaves were fed during the Atlantic voyages. Richard Lander noted that a large proportion of the yams Brass imported from Aboh was actually sold to European slave ships.[8] In point of fact, King Boy's canoe in which the Landers were taken to Brass after their release by Obi Ossai was said to contain over 2,000 yams which the Brass King said he intended to sell to a Spanish slave ship on the Brass River.[9]

The trade in foodstuff and petty commodities covered a

wide area. Although the Aboh were an agricultural people, they produced only a small proportion of these items relative to the volume, so that traders from Aboh travelled further inland. Aboh traditions tell of a long established trade in foodstuff with the Ukwuani country to the northwest, expecially in markets situated on the Ase River.[10] One item the Aboh specifically mentioned as looming large in this early trade connections was thatch (specially prepared palm-leaves for roofing purposes) in exchange for salt. Foodstuff, notably rice, beans, bullocks and dogs were freely imported from the markets situated on the confluence. Great quantities of camwood was also imported from the forests of Ossamari.[11] In addition to brass and copper, which the Aboh imported from Fundah on the Benue, indigo and copper pipe bowls were also important items of trade.

Canoes were an essential commodity of trade. They provided the only means of transporting bulk goods along the Niger and its tributaries, and were consequently in very high demand. The Aboh, who had access to heavy timber (akpu), early specialized in the manufacture of various sizes of canoes which the Landers reported were sold to traders as far south as the Benin branch, or Kalabari in the eastern Delta.

Another commodity of great value was ivory. The Aboh produced no ivory, and depended on the great ivory markets on the Niger and Benue for supplies. The latter river, particularly the Shari region, was famed for the production

of better quality ivory. Kiri in Igala was the principal ivory market on the Niger Valley, and Laird reported that a visitor to this market was almost deafened by the cries of "Gewaw Gewaw," which meant "a tooth, a tooth," from several fine well-formed slaves. Some of the teeth they carried weighed from fifty to one hundred pounds.[12]

The Aboh resold little of their ivory because it was in very great demand here for use in the manufacture of wristlets and anklets. In 1854, Hutchinson reported that traders from the north actually preferred to take their supplies of ivory to Aboh where "they got the highest price for them."[13] According to Dr. W. B. Baikie, ivory ornaments were not only expensive and in great demand, the custom of burying the women with these costly ornaments increased the demand for ivory in Aboh, since an elephant tooth was used once, and went out of circulation for good.

It is decidedly difficult to determine the volume of the items in this category of trade. The fragments of data on such major export items as slaves and palm-oil contain little mention of foodstuff. The most that can be said is that demand for food items was both considerable and profitable. The same can be said for the trade in canoes and ivory. On one occasion in 1832, Richard Lander took aboard the Alburkah, the brother of the King of Damugoo, "who was on his way to the Aboh market with sixteen elephant teeth."[14] Although all the tusks were purchased by Macgregor Laird,

such a large quantity of ivory being taken to the Aboh Fair by one merchant alone is a fair index of the large quantity which was traded at Aboh over a period.

III

Export trade: Slaves

It was suggested that the impetus for the migration to Aboh by people who had been settled in Ashaka, to which place the Ijo dealers in slaves came up the Ase River, may have been the expanding trade in slaves after the sixteenth century. Her traditions tell of raids for and trade in slaves early in the kingdom's history. It was further suggested that changes in the kingdoms political and social institutions were profoundly affected by the slave trade. Evidence from the reign of Obi Ossai indicates that, until its abolition in the early decades of the nineteenth century, a great proportion of Aboh's wealth, and power was derived from this trade.

Sir George Stephen in his treatise, The Niger Considered in Connection with the African Blockade which appeared in 1849, argued that supplies for the foreign slave trade appear to be essentially contributed from the region of the Niger, the navigation of which was controlled by the Obi of Aboh and the Attah of Igala. Like many others of his day, Sir George Stephen thought that the appropriate solution to the issue was for the British to negotiate anti-slave trade treaties with these monarchs with a view to getting them to

put a stop to the traffic.[15]

The earliest account of the place of Aboh in this trade is contained in an 1830 journal by John and Richard Lander who observed that "Aboh has for a series of years been the principal slave mart for the native traders from the coast between the Bonny and the Old Calabar rivers..."[16] Some of the slaves sold at Aboh were imported from markets as close as Okpai, Iselegu and Ashaka on the Ase River. Oral traditions of Ashaka indicate that it was the principal market for areas northwest of Aboh.[17] The markets listed above seldom organized raids of their own. According to traditions collected at Ashaka, slaves were brought there by Ukwuani and Isoko merchants in small numbers, where they were purchased and resold to Aboh traders on Ashaka market days. Among the Ukwuani and Isoko, recourse was had more to kidnapping than warfare. As late as the third decade of the present century, methods which were no doubt developed much earlier were still being used. Usually, the victims of the traffic were enticed away by a band of "professionals," who then carried them to distant slave markets. In 1928, J. B. Mackay, District Officer for Kwale reported the existence of:

> gangs of men whose profession is to entice girls into canoes when markets are being held and then take them by night to Ijaw country for sale.[18]

The figures from these early twentieth century activities indicate that the number involved was small, but there is little doubt that the volume of slaves reaching Aboh from this source was considerable in earlier times.

As evidence from Aboh oral traditions indicate, the Aboh people organized raids on neighbouring peoples, and although the purpose was not always to capture slaves, some were nevertheless taken whenever opportunities offered themselves. Mid-eighteenth century traditions tell of raids on the Abarra Osimili, victims of whom were sold into slavery.[19] There is little doubt that other communities with no access to European munitions suffered the fate recounted by the Abarra themselves. In the first half of the nineteenth century Obi Ossai I confessed to Captain Trotter that he took slaves from wars with chiefs who quarrelled with him. The citizens also confessed that they "often went into the bush to fight,' a reference no doubt to wars on land which did not involve the use of war canoes.[20] The presence of a large clay 'goddess of war,' in the palace of Obi Ossai, to which all Aboh soldiers addressed their prayers for safety before leaving for any battle, indicates that fighting was a regular feature in the relations with neighboring peoples during this time.[21] The return of captives from these encounters would also be a regular feature of these wars.

By far the greatest proportion of slaves sold at Aboh were obtained from the markets of the confluence, the more important of which were in the kingdom of Igala. The three major markets here were Adamugu, some fifteen miles south of Idah, Idah, the capital of the Igala kingdom, and Ikiri twenty four miles north of Idah. Ikiri, which was also referred to as Bocqua by Europeans in the early nineteenth

century, is the Igala word for 'the market between two hills' or 'distant market' and was the most important of all the markets of the north in the Lower Niger system. These markets were supplied from raids and wars on the loosely organized peoples of the Niger and Benue.[22]

In the slave trade as in other commodities, evidence of volume is deplorably small. Available estimates, usually by anti-slave trade enthusiasts, would appear to have been grossly exaggerated, and need to be accepted with caution. Dr. Baikie estimated that the average number of slaves traded daily in Bida on the upper Niger totalled between 300 and 400. Kano which he described as "the grand receptacle" and the main supply for the confluence markets accounted for a daily average of 2,500 to 3,000.[23] Slaves became so important a commodity in the Igala markets that Laird observed there was little else to trade in besides slaves. "Every time the Attah pleaded with the mission to trade with him," wrote Laird, "he ended with, why won't you take men?" (instead of ivory).[24] Recent studies on the sources of the Atlantic slave trade in the nineteenth century indicate that the trade had penetrated much deeper into the interior, centering on the Niger and Benue rivers.[25]

The three day Kiri fair is said to be attended by a capacity crowd of 6,000 persons, from as far south as Aboh, and as far east on the Benue as Kakanda. It was always easy to distinguish the Aboh merchant from the others at Kiri. Besides their "national mark" of three perpendicular

incisions on each temple, they were usually to be seen in their "half European dress, wearing sometimes a jacket which they are very proud of."[26] According to Macgregor Laird, some 11,400 slaves were sold annually at Kiri, mostly males and females aged between five and thirty. They were usually of the Nupe and Ibodo (Kakanda on the Benue) tribe, and the greater proportion were forwarded to the Atlantic coast.[27]

Oldfield's figure, which he obtained from an estimate of the number of canoes at the Kiri fair would appear to be close to reality. For example, he allowed for a conservative estimate of fifty canoes per market day, each of which took eight or ten slaves, although he also notes that there were double that number of canoes. Admittedly a good proportion of these canoes carried other items of trade, but most canoes carried slaves in addition. In 1841, the Trotter Expedition described a fleet of about 75 Aboh canoes, some of which were large enough to accomodate 70 persons returning from Kiri. A good part of the cargo was reported to be made up of slaves. This is not to be doubted for Obi Ossai had confessed to the commissioners that his son Aje had gone to Igala to purchase slaves.[28]

At Aboh, the slaves collected from the various sources already described--war raids and trade, were gathered in special enclosures. Most of the principal chiefs and traders of Aboh had their own barracoons where the slaves were temporarily kept awaiting shipment to the coast. Obi Ossai's slave

barracoon was described by Captain Allen and Thomson thus:

> Adjoining Obi Ossai's house was a high enclosure, between the pailings of which were several pairs of eyes turned towards us with anxiety and curiosity. On mounting one of the posts to obtain a better view, they all rushed...into small dens, the rattlings of their chains at once pointing out that they are newly captured slaves.[29]

On Aboh 'fair' days, merchants from the coast, from the Benin to Bonny, came in large numbers, and in very large canoes to trade in slaves. Demands were particularly high whenever slavers were awaiting the return of the missions of their coastal agents. In 1830, the Landers found King Boy Amain of Nembe-Brass at Aboh, and the latter informed them that "he had come here for the purpose of buying slaves for a Spanish vessel."[30]

The fragmentary nature of the data on the volume of slaves traded at Aboh does not allow for any concrete estimate. Usually figures exist for exportation from the coastal ports, but there is little indication as to where each consignment came from. Thus, such figures as these allow only for intelligent guesses. In 1832, Oldfield reported the presence in the Brass River of a Spanish slave ship which succeeded in collecting a cargo of 329 slaves after only two days in port. According to Oldfield, most of the slaves were natives of Eboe and Nuffie.[31] The former was no doubt a reference to slaves who were either captured or traded in the hinterland of Aboh while the latter refers to slaves who were imported from Igala. Since the Brass King had unlimited access to commodities of trade at the Aboh market, the chances that the greater proportion of this load came from Aboh are high.

The master of the slave ship told Oldfield that he had succeeded in making ten trips to Brass without being caught by the British naval squadron. Unfortunately there is no indication of the period over which the ten trips were made.

The export traffic in slaves at Aboh must have been adversely affected by the naval blockade of the principal ports, although the Brass seemed to have escaped the most scrupulous and concerted search. In 1841, Obi Ossai gave Captain Henry Trotter the impression that the slave trade had to a large extent ceased in Aboh, for he was encountering great difficulties in selling his slaves on the coast. This may have influenced his readiness to abolish the trade and switch to legitimate trade. But it may also have been a ruse, aimed at veiling the fact that he had discovered routes less accessible to the British Navy. Captain Allen noted that Obi Ossai seemed very amused when Captain Trotter told him that he (Obi Ossai) could not sell slaves even if he was disinclined to stop the trade, because the British Queen had blockaded the mouths of the river. Much of Obi Ossai's amusement, reported Allen "arose from his knowing that slaves were shipped off at ports of the coast little thought of by us."[32] The fact that Brazilian rum was plentiful at Aboh indicated that they carried on trade with peoples whose objectives could have been nothing other than the procurement of slaves.

As a matter of fact Obi Ossai, and perhaps his predecessors at the beginning of the nineteenth century, may have

established commercial links with Lagos and Whydah. The fact that one of Obi Ossai's many wives was from the kingdom of Ashanti in far away Gold Coast indicates that there existed a great deal of contact between Aboh and the state systems to the west of her, and some of these contacts may have been intended to foster trade. Allen noted that since the blockade and the decline of the slave trade in Bonny and Brass,

> the greater portion of the slaves collected by the Ibu [Aboh] people are sent down in canoes by the Benin branch of the seacoast, thence they were forwarded through the Lagos creek to Lagos and Whydah.[33]

The Bonny whose port had been blockaded actually resorted to bringing their slaves to sell at Aboh. Apparently they were aware of the fact that Obi Ossai was still able to send slaves to the coast. Simon Jonas who resided in Aboh for sometime in 1841 reported that the "Bonny people carried slaves to Aboh for sale, but lately, were told that Obi Ossai had given up the slave trade."[34]

How far the situation was altered by the death of Obi Ossai in 1844, cannot be seriously determined, but the slave trade probably continued to form one of the two major exports of Aboh. Late in 1860, for example, Mr. George Lyall who had been agent for the factory of Macgregor Laird in Aboh, reported that a fleet of sixty large canoes from Brass came to Aboh "in earnest search for slaves and in a few days, pruchased every one for sale in Aboh." Since that time Lyall went on,

> nearly as many Aboh canoes have come up to Idda, their furthest limit on a like errand. During the stay of the Brass canoes at Aboh, all trade except in slaves was at a dead end.[35]

The entries in the journal of Mr. William Cole, who succeeded Lyall as agent at Aboh indicate that slaves continued to form a major arm of Aboh trade. Typical of Cole's reports was one which noted the departure of 40 Brass canoes from Aboh, "freighted with slaves."[36] Late in 1860, Commander Sholto Douglas of the Naval Squadron who had come up the Niger to investigate attacks on British property, reported that the Anti Slave Trade Treaty with Obi Ossai in 1841 was "a perfect dead letter." Prince Aje, whom Douglas erroneously described as "the present king," actually denied any knowledge of the treaty.[37] According to Commander Douglas

> a large number of slaves are sold down the river from Aboh, mostly to the Brass men, who pay for them with guns, rum and salt; as many as 100 have been sold in this manner in one day.[38]

Aje seemed to have completely disregarded the presence of a British naval ship on the Niger for he was reported to have approached the officers of the Espoir to enquire "why it was that they did not buy slaves, he was able to fill three ships, if only they would buy."[39]

The slave trade continued in Aboh late into the nineteenth century, inspite of the presence of the Royal Niger Company on the Niger. Major Claude Macdonald who visited Aboh in 1889 observed that the slave trade was openly carried on at Aboh, and it was only after he had issued directives that the Company's Agent General, issued orders on January 26, 1890 that "no slaves were to be brought down the River."[40] But some changes in organization and volume seemed to have occurred. Instead of Aboh merchants going to Idah and Kiri,

the slaves were daily brought to a place called "Egarrah bank," opposite Onitsha, where they were purchased by Aboh merchants. The volume had greatly declined. The monthly average for 1889, according to Macdonald, was about 62, compared to about 100 daily in the 1860's.[41] It should also be observed that the slave trade for this latter period was entirely for local African consumption, the overseas market having been cut off after the mid-1860s.

IV

Export trade: Palm Oil

Although the export trade in slaves had declined considerably, some slaves were exported from the Niger Delta until the middle of the nineteenth century.[42] Officially however, the slave trade had been replaced by legitimate trade in palm-oil which began soon after the abolition of the slave trade by the British Parliament in 1807. There is no evidence as to when Aboh merchants began the gradual switch-over into the export of palm-oil. It had earlier been produced for local consumption and trade, which partially accounts for the relative ease with which both the manufacturers and traders accomplished the transition to export production.

The earliest account of Aboh's position in the palm-oil trade is contained in the 1830 journal of the Landers. Here Aboh was described as having attained "equal celebrity" for her production of palm oil, as for her trade in slaves.[43]

But Aboh's 'celebrity' was far less in her ability to actually manufacture palm-oil than in her ability to forge commercial and political contacts with the actual producers. Attention was drawn to the fact that a good proportion of the trade oil was manufactured by Isoko migrant laborers-- the ukane parties-- who leased rich palm-oil land from the Aboh and other peoples. Further inland were the Urhobo and Ukwuani whose major occupations included the making of palm-oil. Aboh's strategic location however ensured that most of the oil produced in the country around found their way there. In 1854, Consul Hutchinson commented upon the value of Aboh for the palm-oil trade of the Itsekiri, and the Brass. Wrote he:

> There is no direct communication between these places, for the traffic is carried on at intermediate markets, and I have no doubt that a trading station at Aboh would command the produce of the surrounding country, for nearly half the price which the oil brings in Benin and Brass markets.[44]

Richard and John Lander disclosed that "most of the oil purchased by Englishmen at the Bonny and the adjacent Rivers is brought from Aboh, while also noting that the Brass River was "entirely supplied from Aboh."[45] The dearth of data on the palm-oil trade of the Niger Valley has tended to obscure the economic importance of this region for the European palm-oil trade. Professor K. O. Dike, in his Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1841-1886, all but neglected the Niger Valley as a major source of the European trade. According to Dike, 'all' of the palm-oil handled at Bonny which amounted to over fifty percent of the entire Delta trade in the

nineteenth century, came from an enumerated list of markets east of the River Niger.[46]

The truth however was that Bonny's fame, as was those of the other coastal states depended to a considerable extent on the Niger Valley. The brass River obtained the bulk of her palm-oil by trade with Aboh. This was a consequence of several factors, three of which may briefly be noted. First, Nembe-Brass, was the closest of all the Delta city states, to Aboh. Second, she had the advantage of an all-season route to Aboh. Third, there would seem to have been some form of political accord between the kings of Brass and Aboh, cemented by affinal links in the reign of Obi Ossai.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the volume of Brass palm-oil export was computed at 2,280 tons compared with 16,000-17,000 tons for Bonny and New Calabar ports together.[47] As will shortly be apparent, the figure for Brass is not representative of the total volume of palm-oil handled by Brass traders and by inference a good portion of the Aboh trade in palm-oil. Contrary to the impression Professor Dike gives, Bonny merchants actually traded in the markets of the Niger Valley, and by no means restricted their operations to areas east of the Niger. They traded for palm-oil at Aboh. In 1832, Oldfield reported the arrival of a number of Bonny traders at Aboh to purchase palm-oil.[48] Obi Ossai informed Laird that the Bonny traders obtained their supplies from him, while evidence at our disposal indicates that Obi Ossai and King Pepple of Bonny had established friendly relations, and the latter usually

received consignment of produce from the Aboh king. Later in 1841, the Reverend Schon confirmed the earlier testimony of Oldfield on Bonny traders and the Niger Valley. "The people of Bonny," he observed, "came up as far as Abo for palm-oil for which they pay chiefly in rum, guns and powder."[49]

Most of the time, however, the Bonny people obtained palm-oil from the Niger markets through Brass merchants who acted as intermediaries between the Bonny and the Aboh. Evidence of this practice is to be found in the accounts of the various expeditions to the Niger. In 1832, for example, Macgregor Laird identified puncheons belonging to vessels in Bonny in canoes brought to Aboh by the Brass people.[50]

R. A. K. Oldfield reported passing

> A great numbers of Brass canoes filled with pots containing palm-oil ... some of the large canoes carried puncheons sent by Bonny to Brass to be filled[51]

Nine years later, Captain William Allen observed several large canoes belonging to the Brass off the village of Indiama "deeply laden with puncheons of palm-oil" on their way to Bonny from Aboh.[52] The link in this pattern of trade was King Boy Amain of Brass. Trading almost exclusively in Aboh, King Boy boasted to Oldfield that he was "capable of supplying a ship with fifty puncheons of oil in a month (one moon)," and had actually loaded the Susan with oil in two months.[53] Macgregor Laird also reported that palm-oil was the main commodity which King Boy sold to the Bonny traders in return for a variety of manufactured goods.[54]

The major reason for Bonny's reliance on the Brass for

the procurement of oil from the Niger Valley, and more especially from the market of Aboh was the lack of an all season route into the Niger. The town of Ndoni stands on a creek which leads to Bonny and New Calabar. This creek which Europeans, through ignorance, named the "Bonny Creek" is in fact the Onite or Ndoni Creek which flows in a south-easterly direction for some fifteen miles and then joins the river Orashi or Angeni. The latter eventually opens into the Atlantic through the Sombrero and New Calabar Rivers. But the so called 'Bonny Creek' affords direct communication with the Niger markets for a limited period during the west season. "When the river is full, noted Laird, the Bonny people pass up this branch when they come to trade for palm-oil and ivory."[55] But the creek is interrupted and unavigable for about eight months of the year, so that both the Bonny and New Calabar merchants are cut off from the Niger Valley. It is chiefly for this reason that "Eboe oil... finds its way through the Brass creek to Bonny,' or through the second method by which Bonny merchants came to Brass to purchase palm-oil. According to R. A. K. Oldfield, there was so much oil in Brass because

> Great quantities of it palm-oil are brought from Eboe [Aboh] country to Brass from where it is purchased by the Bonny traders.[56]

It is thus obvious that the total volume of oil traded at Aboh in both the direct trade to Brass and the Benin River, as well as the indirect trade with Bonny and New Calabar may never be accurately determined. The total volume of palm-oil exported annually from the Delta in the

1840s was computed at between 15,000 to 20,000 tons worth between £500,000 and £750,000.[57] At the close of the century, the contribution of Niger Valley to the European palm-oil trade was estimated at about 8,000 tons annaully,[58] but even this conservative estimate constituted a considerable part of the total export from the Delta ports. There is no method of calculating Aboh's share in the total Niger Valley tonnage, but considering her position, and the pattern of trade already described, it must have been considerable.

Whatever the actual figures may have been, available evidence indicates that until the 1860's when the existing middleman pattern was overturned by European activities in the Niger Valley, the entrepot of Aboh continued to play a vital role in the palm-oil trade of the Niger and Delta. The Niger Valley and Brass continued to be an important source for the trade of Bonny. In 1859 for example, the super cargoes in the Bonny River were unable to buy any oil owing to the prevailing war between Bonny and New Calabar. The frustrated Bonny regents dispatched a hurried message to the British consul in which they informed him that King Amachree of Kalabari had prohibited Bonny merchants from using his rivers to go into the Brass to purchase palm-oil. Consul Hutchinson immediately proceeded to New Calabar in the Sharpshooter and remontrated with Amachree for placing a ban on the use of his river by Bonny. He described the action as "a great detriment to Bonny trade."[59] The tone of the letter from the Bonny regents is an indication of the

relative value of the Brass and Niger markets to the Bonny trade. They had written:

> That time we gather, we grandfather and we king live [a reference to an earlier meeting with the Consul during the lifetime of King Pepple], Bonny trade for all Brass country. (Aboae, Beelae, Nimbae, Aegannie, Aquaffie, Indelli, Osasie, Ebay, etc.) but that time we king go [i.e. since the death of our king], too much palavar live for this country, and then them young Calabar men I am head for stop we trade for all them country. Suppose if no be white man, we must send war canoe for take care of we Brass trade, no more we no want for go for war for spoil any trade but suppose Bonny man send canoe for trade for any of them country and Calabar man put hand for them canoe (as he done do plenty time), by palavar must come up for them young Calabar.
> We now beg for tell them young Calabar men for no put hand for we trade for all them [i.e. Brass] country....[60]

Trade in palm-oil changed considerably in the 1860s after European penetration of the Niger and the establishment of factories. The Brass were particularly hurt by the British trading factory at Aboh. Brass exports decreased considerably as did her ability to resell palm-oil to Bonny. Mr. William Cole who was agent of the factory at Aboh was consistently harrassed by the Brassmen who threatened to destroy the factory. They complained that the British presence had ruined their trade. Cole recorded that the Brass were "greatly incensed at our continued residence at Aboh"[61] but it was not until 1895 that they felt sufficiently angered into an armed attack on the British.[62]

V

Markets, Routes and Organization

Attention has been drawn to the fact that the Lower Niger River, constituted a closely knit economic unit. There were however two axis in the markets of this system: the Delta to Aboh and Aboh to Igala.

Two options were ordinarily open to the traders of the Niger. The first was long distance trade and second the middleman system. In the former case, the merchants covered the entire length of the system. In other words, traders from the Delta travel to Igala and beyond, and northern merchants came all the way into the Delta city states. There is evidence that this system was resorted to by the traders at both ends of the system. For example, at Wawa, southwest of Bussa, the Landers found that a large number of people made canoe trips as far south as Benin, with cloth, ivory, beads and other commodities of the north. In the third decade of the nineteenth century, an English merchant at the Benin port of Ughotton, a Mr. Houston, reported that he was able to collect "much valuable information from traders who came thither from Haussa and other provinces of the Sudan "[63] The Delta Ijo were also known to have travelled in the opposite direction. In 1830, the Landers found a party of coastal merchants at Adamugu who had come thither with manufactured goods to trade on behalf of King Pepple of Bonny. The explorers actually negotiated with these merchants to take them to the

coast, but they were all conducted to Aboh after an attack near Asaba. Two years later Oldfield found one Aggary, "a subject of King Pepple's at Bonny with rum, iron bars and cloth for slaves" at the confluence.[64]

But as Dr. Ifemesia noted, the long distance method must have been restricted to the very few who were able to forge the type of political links which guaranteed the protection of their canoes in the Niger. It is instructive to observe that all the traders reported to have been seen on the Niger were messengers of King Pepple of Bonny. Besides, such a journey "demanded considerable capital investment in canoes and cargoes to make it an economic proposition," and few people could afford this.[65] In addition, much time and energy were unnecessarily expended in a venture of doubtful consequence. For example, King Boy of Brass informed R. A. K. Oldfield that it usually took him eight days to cover the 147 miles journey to Aboh. The Igala markets were another 150 miles from Aboh, which would mean a total of about 300 miles. The journey downstream was however covered in a lesser time.

Trade on the Niger, it was earlier stated, involved dire risks of attack by merchants who while not profitably engaged took to piracy. The unprovoked attack on the Landers off Asaba is one example of the dangers of long distance trade. Furthermore, trading on the Niger Vally was compartmentalized, with the powerful state systems controlling a considerable stretch of the Niger. It was stated that in the portion of

the River between the

> dominions of the Obi of Aboh and the confluence,... the inhabitants... carry on the entire trade, under the control of the chief of Eggarah, himself a great trader, and without whose knowledge no mercantile transaction can be entered into.[66]

The commissioners of the 1841 expedition to the Niger observed that "merchants ... never traverse a foreign state to visit a distant market."[67] Trade was however negotiated between the monarchs on the Niger, and permission was granted their respective merchants to trade in one another's markets.

Therefore, the bulk of the trade was conducted through the second method --the middleman system. Coastal traders from the Itsekiri in the Forcados branch, Brass in the Central Delta, largely resorted to buying and selling in the market at Aboh.

The Aboh port was in like manner connected with smaller markets in her immediate hinterland as well as the big markets of Igala and beyond. Of some importance to her oil trade was the Isoko market of Ivrogbo, west of Aboh, which connects all the routes leading into the great palm-oil producing country of the Isoko and Urhobo.[68] There were in addition many markets in the Ukwuani country, all of which were connected to the port towns of Iselegu, Utagba and Ashaka on the Ase River. Oral evidence as to pre-colonial trade patterns is borne out by the remarks of a District Officer in 1906 to the effect that

> "the trade of the greater part of the Kwale country which naturally traded with the Niger went through Aboh."[69]

The nearby markets were held more frequently, and as is the case to this day, once in every Igbo week of four days. Market days were so systemized that days of the week became identified with particular markets. Thus one day would be known by the people in the country around as afia Ashaka, the other afia Okpai or afia Iselegu. And because the markets were multiple, trading around Aboh became a daily affair, and involved almost every person in the city. Thus, when in 1841 the Wilberforce called at Aboh to replenish her stock of firewood, none could be supplied by Obi Ossai

> owing to the absence of almost the entire grown up male population in the neighbouring markets.[70]

Earlier in 1832, Macgregor Laird recorded this sight of Aboh citizens--men and women--leaving the town for the neighbourhood markets.

> At day break, I was much pleased to see a fleet of canoes of all sizes leaving the town for the purpose of collecting palm-oil, yams, and other provisions, for it gave an assurance of the regular and industrious habits of the people. There could not have been less than from one hundred to one hundred and fifty; and in the evening, they came dropping in with their cargoes of yams, bananas, and palm-oil in large gourds...[71]

But the principal feature of the Niger Valley trading system was the large fairs or what Dr. Briggs described as "international markets." These were held at longer intervals, usually on sand beaches or 'islands' on the River Niger during the dry season. The 'international fairs' of Aboh, Asaba (Kiree), and Kiri in Igala were all held on beaches. Kiri was held on a sandy island in the middle of the River Niger,

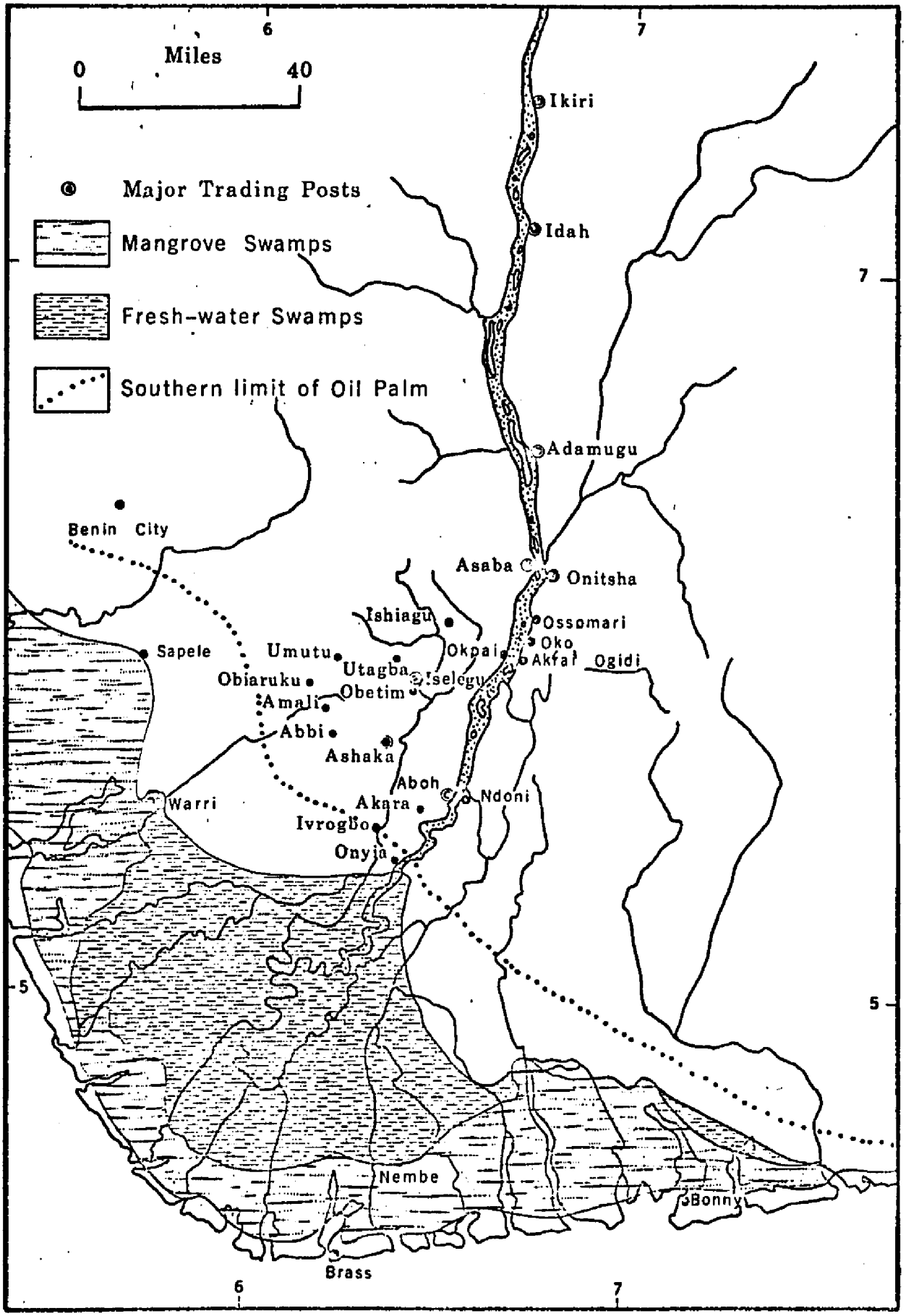


Fig. 14. Markets of the Lower Niger

but when the island is overflooded, the market was shifted to the eastern shore of the River. Usually, the fairs lasted for about two or three days, so that merchants came prepared to pass the night in the market towns or in bamboo awnings in their canoes which were moored by the riverside. The Kiri fair, for example, laster for three days, and was held at intervals of ten days. It was, according to eye witness accounts, attended by traders from Aboh, Idah, Egga on the Niger, Cutfum Curafee and Fundah on the Benue, "besides great numbers from the interior country on both banks of the river." Even Arab merchants from the far north came to Kiri with beads, horses and cloth.[72]

As can be seen from the Kiri example, the Niger Valley fairs were usually well attended. Recounting his experience of attendance at their fairs, Dr. Briggs of the Macgregor Laird expedition observed that there appeared to be twice as much traffic on the Lower Niger than in the upper parts of the River Rhine, "the whole population on the Niger being eminently of a commercial character."[73]

Attendance was also guaranteed by certain laws. For example, every market guaranteed some measure of safety to merchants and their commodities. According to Captain Allen, "all property brought for sale is considered sacred even in time of war."[74] Attendance at the fairs also tended to be formal and under armed escort. One such party of Aboh merchants going to the relatively near market of Asaba is described for us by R. A. K. Oldfield:

> "Several of Obie's [Obi Ossai] canoes were within three hundred yards of us. The canoes which we had seen amounted to about three hundred, going up to the Kiree market; and the river had the appearance of a regatta, almost every canoe having a piece of white cotton flying on which were painted various devices, as skulls, crocodiles, trees, etc."[76]

The middleman system, which the evidence shows to be overwhelmingly resorted to by the coastal merchants, meant that they brought European manufactures and cowries to Aboh. The Aboh merchants had in the meantime travelled to the various markets to trade for commodities which were brought back, and exchanged with the coastal middlemen. It was necessary to keep the market day schedule, for only then could there be certainty of commodities. A nineteenth-century observer summed up the system in these words:

> "The Eboe people take up the river, powder, yams, beads, cloth, iron bars, and knives. These articles are conveyed to Bonny by the palm-oil traders i.e. English merchants ; and thence pass through the hands of three or four merchants [intermediaries] into the possession of Eboe dealers. They [Aboh] receive in return slaves, rice, goats, fowls, calabashes, mats, country beads, horses of a small breed and elephant teeth."[77]

In passing, one other peculiarity of the Niger Valley should be noted. Intermediate markets which tapped the resources of their immediate vicinity helped the entrepot trade of Aboh. For the palm-oil trade, Baikie, noted that a considerable quantity of palm-oil was bought from the interior of Ossomari, the chief port of Isuama, and from there "was either sold directly to Aboh and oru traders, or else it was taken to Aboh for disposal."[78] The people of Ndoni were reported "to go as far north as Idah for oil which they bring

to Aboh for sale."[79]

Just as there were intermediate markets for collecting and trading commodities, so were there secondary markets where goods were disposed of further south for the benefit of coastal people who could not always get to Aboh. The Benin River people "come as far as Aboh for palm-oil," but more often, the Itsekiri, whom the Aboh refer to as Iwenni, came up the Niger as far as Onya "the lowest in Obi's dominion". Here they purchase palm-oil from Aboh merchants.[80]

Most coastal cities had agents who took care of their trade in Aboh. Even the relatively short journey from the coast to Aboh was not undertaken indiscriminately. The Brass King seemed to have operated on a regular schedule, based on 'moons', and it was the responsibility of their agents (usually trusted local magnates) to trade merchandise in advance of their arrival. Sometimes an agent was a very close member of one's family, the result of more enduring alliance. For example, King Boy of Brass had married Adaeze, the eldest daughter of Obi Ossai I, but she was nevertheless almost always at Aboh. In 1832 Laird invited her to see the cabins of the vessel, but the princess regretted her inability to honor the invitation as she was "too much engaged in trading for palm-oil against the time her royal master returns."[81] The Aboh merchants also retained agents in the other markets they attended, notably at Ashaka on the Ase Creek, and below Aboh. For example, Obi Ossai I was reported to have employed the services of a trader in the Ijo market town of Kurotumbi or Abonta (little Aboh) further down the Niger to help with

his palm-oil trade in that region.[82]

The entire community engaged in the port trade. Citizens attended the nearby markets to purchase small quantities of produce. Those who could afford it went further up the Niger, but the export trade from Aboh to the coast was rigidly controlled by the Obi. In this regard, the Aboh monarch shared identical qualities with such merchant princes, and trade monopolists as the Oba of Benin, Ata of Igala, and some of the rulers of the coastal city states. Captain Trotter observed that the appearance of Obi Ossai, with the exception of his dress, was more that of "a keen trader than a sovereign chief of an extensive territory."[83] Allen added that the Obi of Aboh "is the principal merchant as well as sovereign of the country."[84] Dues were demanded from traders at Aboh. It was reported that King Boy of Brass paid some tax for his trading privileges at Aboh.[85] No one could trade in primary export commodities until the Obi, through his sons or trusted chiefs, and other senior chiefs had completed their business.

Such a monopoly in the most profitable sector of the kingdom's economy had significant implications. It ensured that the king was the wealthiest person in the kingdom. This economic power, coupled with his ascribed divine right, enhanced his position vis-a-vis his subjects. With over 300 slaves, fiften war canoes, and about 110 wives, no one in the Aboh of the first half of the nineteenth century could have stood up to Obi Ossai. The nature of the imports for which

the commodities were exchanged were of paramount importance. For an inland state, where citizens had no direct communication with the coast, and therefore with European manufactures their chief source would naturally be accorded special respect. It also placed Aboh, vis-a-vis the other kingdoms located further up the Niger at a considerable advantage. Aboh controlled, to a large extent, the flow of arms up the Niger. For example, Baikie reported that

> "Inam and Nsugbe are supplied with muskets mostly from Idda to which place they are brought from Aboh."[86]

Although the various Niger Valley and Delta peoples spoke diverse languages (Ijo, Igbo, Igala and Hausa principally), communication for trade purposes was fairly easy. The presence of domestic servants of northern origin in Aboh ensured that the Aboh could trade fairly easily in the markets of the north. Ali, the Hausa slave of Obi Ossai, acted as interpreter for every British Niger expedition between 1832 and 1857. Generally, however, the traders made it a point to study the languages of the places they traded to. Thus the Bonny and Brass spoke some Aboh while Aboh merchants understood some Ijo. English seem to have been commonly spoken in Aboh and perhaps beyond, wherever the coastal people went. The Aboh were said to be particularly anxious to advertise their knowledge of English, including Obi Ossai, whom Macgregor Laird found could speak "rather fair pigeon."[87]

But there were places along the Niger where recourse was had to the technique of silent trade. In November 1830, when

the Landers were being taken to Aboh from Asaba, their canoes stopped at a village, a short distance from Asaba, apparently in an Igbo-speaking country. The account which the Landers filed of the trade in yams bears a striking resemblance to the silent trade in gold in the ancient West African Kingdom of Ghana.

> The main object of our visit was to purchase yams, and our people Aboh had succeeded in getting the villagers to bring some down to the canoes. These people, however had armed themselves either with a gun or sword and had no women among them, excepting one old one who appeared to be of some consequence .... The old woman directed all the yams to be placed in a row before our people ... and the owners ordered to retire a short distance, which order was implicitly obeyed. The purchaser now inspected the bundles and having selected one to his satisfaction ... placed what he considered to be its value by the side of it, consisting of cloth, flint, etc. The old lady looking on all the time, if in her opinion it was sufficient to give, takes up the cloth, and gives the owner of the bundle, and the purchaser likewise takes away the yams. But on the contrary, if the cloth, or whatever was thus offered is not considered sufficient by the old woman, she allows it to remain a short time, to give him an opportunity of adding something else to the offer. If this was not done, the owner of the yams was directed by the old woman to take them back ... leaving what had been offered for them .. All this was carried on without a word passing between the parties, and the purchase of a sufficient number of yams by our own people occupied three hours.[88]

Given the relative sophistication of the Niger Valley trade, it is difficult to believe that people who could communicate in the Igbo language chose to adopt this winding process of trading. It is also significant that no women except the old woman of 'consequence' was around, and that all the men came to the riverside armed. The Landers suggest that the system developed out of mistrust and fear, but it seems to have been well established, for "both parties quite understood

how they were to act."[89] This technique could not have been widespread, and was certainly unknown in the big fairs.

The Trust System

The technique of credit trading would seem to have been early integrated into the Niger Valley trading system.[90] It consisted essentially in the advancing or trusting of manufactured goods to African middlemen by European traders. The former were thus provided with credit 'cash' in goods with which they went into the interior markets to purchase commodities. The produce equivalent of the goods so trusted was generally agreed upon by the super-cargoes and the middlemen, but the latter were usually allowed a long period from six months to one year--within which to deliver the total goods or, in other words, liquidate the trust.

Exactly when the 'trust' system extended in land to Aboh, and by whom it was begun, cannot now be determined with any certainty. Dr. Ifemesia has claimed that the 'trust' system was introduced into Aboh in 1835 by John Beecroft.[91] The earliest documented evidence of the trust in Aboh was on the occasion of Beecrofts' visit to Aboh, but this was about the time when any event in Aboh was documented. Thus the lack of documentation for earlier periods does not necessarily mean that the trust system was not in use earlier. That Obi Ossai understood the system rather well argues for an older establishment of the system in Aboh.

It used to be thought that such innovations always began in the coast, but Ryder's study of trade in Benin would seem to indicate that a practice akin to the trust system as practised in the Delta existed in Benin in the early sixteenth century.[92] In 1835, Beecroft had advanced Obi Ossai trust for 20 puncheons of oil, to be paid on his return from Idah. The oil was ready when Beecroft returned but he had no cask in which to convey the oil. He not only left the oil, he further advanced Obi Ossai trust for 20 more puncheons, all of which he hoped to collect on another ascent of the river. It should be noted that Beecroft also distributed trust at Idah and other markets along the Niger. There is little doubt then that the credit system had been used in Aboh for a considerable time before Beecroft's visit, and may have been extended inland by the coastal Ijo traders.

In the 1850s when Macgregor Laird's factory operated at Aboh, the technique of trusting goods to merchants was continued and expanded, but the absence of an Obi for most of the time created difficulties. Several influential headmen obtained 'trusts' but prompt repayment was difficult to enforce in the absence of a truly centralized authority. William Cole made regular complaints about the inability or refusal of Aje and other Aboh chiefs to liquidate the 'trusts' advanced them. But the practice seemed to have acquired some unique characteristics. The merchant receiving the trust was now expected to provide some 'security' in the form of slaves or bags of salt, which were reclaimed whenever the

commodity of the trust was delivered. There is evidence that the collateral or security demanded was about the value of the trust. Thus, Chief Okeyea, a son of Obi Ossai, once obtained trust to the value of a ton of palm-oil for which he had to leave a slave in the custody of Mr. Cole.[93] The price of a ton of oil was about the value of a prime slave in mid-nineteenth century Aboh.

VI

Currencies, Prices and Profits

European accounts often referred to the system of exchange in pre-colonial African markets as one of barter. It is now generally realized that trade in many regions of pre-colonial Africa was accomplished by means of complex currency systems. For the nineteenth century, and certainly earlier, the evidence suggests that the Aboh made use of two main currencies--salt and cowries. In 1854, Baikie had observed that

> at Aboh, a great medium of barter is salt, which is brought up from Nimbe and from Bini, and is always in demand. Slaves are almost always purchased with salt, the price varying somewhat according to the condition of the market.[94]

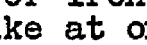
Oral evidence suggests that salt had been in use much earlier, although it is not possible to date this. When Cowries, the second major currency came into use is less definite. Traditions merely assert that they were used by nde gbo (people of old) which gives no indication of time depth. There is evidence that cowries from the Indian Ocean were in

circulation in Benin and in the Forcados River in the early decades of the sixteenth century.[95] Since trade relations existed between the Benin and Aboh long before the nineteenth century, it is possible that cowries must have reached Aboh about the same time as it began circulating in the Benin and Forcados Rivers. Thus, while European imports of cowries in the early decades of the nineteenth century may have resulted in depreciation and increased circulation, cowries were not, contrary to some assertions, introduced into the Niger Valley from the coast in the 1820s.[96] It is to be observed that the Ijo coastal states did not utilize cowries in buying and selling. They accepted it as commodities from the Europeans, reselling it in the hinterlands as valuable currency. Quite obviously there must have existed a prior demand for cowries in the interior or else the Ijo would not have considered it worth their while to trade in it.

By the 1830s cowries had become well established as the major currency of the Niger Valley. According to Macgregor Laird, " cowries will purchase any article from Eboe [Aboh] to Boosa and passes current in every part of the interior."[97] Along the Niger Valley cowries were strung in hundreds, separate strings bearing either one hundred or two hundred cowries. They were so important for the Niver Valley trade, notably at the confluence, that Macgregor Laird found it necessary to sell his goods first for cowries, and later purchase tusks and other commodities with the cowries.[98]

Beside cowries and salt, a few other currencies were

special to limited areas of the Niger Valley, In Idoma country beyond Igala, Baikie reported the existence of a curious type of currency which was even known as far as Kitsina.

> "It is," he wrote, "of iron, made in the form of a small hoe, with a long spike at one end thus:  These are tied up in bundles of a dozen or thereabouts and thirty-six are said to be the ordinary price of a slave. This strange money in Doma is called Akika by the Mitshi, Ibia, and in Hausa Agelema.

Baikie suggests that it is not of recent origin, and antedated the introduction of cowries to the Niger Valley. One of the curiosities of the Lower Niger trade system is that currencies tended to play the role of commodities depending on the market. It has been observed that the Ijo import cowries as commodities, and resell them up the Niger as valuable currency. In the same manner, the Ijo sell their currency, the iron bar, up the Niger Valley as commodities, for iron bars were not current in the Niger.

For the Aboh, the principal motive for engaging in the complex pattern of trade described above is the acquisition of European manufactures, which observers described in the nineteenth century as "necessities." Since these commodities were brought in by the coastal Ijo, the Aboh merchant found that transactions were simplified if he did not insist on receiving 'cash' for his goods. If he did it would mean that the Ijo coastal traders would pay fully for forest produce in cowries or salt, and after this trnsaction, the Aboh would in return buy manufactured goods with the money paid him. But this 'cash' was not current in the coast, and to be able to carry out his own arm of the transaction he would have

to acquire manillas and iron bars. In order therefore to obviate these winding processes, he took to the alternative of accepting as 'cash,' assortments of European manufactures. But these had first to be expressed, item for item, in terms of the local currency. Thus, for a ton of palm-oil, an Aboh merchant would accept as payment some cowries, some salt, and an assortment of manufactured goods. It must be emphasized that in the export sector, Aboh merchant refused to accept payment in one currency--cowries or salt, because he could not purchase European manufactures with them.

Manufactures most suited for trade in Aboh, according to Obi Ossai were cowries, red cloth, red beads, (mock corals) soldier's jackets, Romals and Bandana handkerchiefs, rum, musket (gun) and powder. Others like snuff-boxes, tumblers, looking glasses, hooks and lines, hats, although not expressly listed by the monarch were also accepted.[100]

Since cowries and salt played the role of currency, a commodity of trade had to be set aside for determining the relative values of units of the currency. For the British, twenty shillings was the value of a pound sterling in gold. For the Aboh, it was necessary to solve the problem of how many units of salt or cowry added up to anything concrete. The solution was found in a commodity of great value--the slave. Among the Aboh, the "well formed" slave became the indivisible unit by which value was set.

The following table gives the value of trade commodities (which become cash) and the currencies of Aboh, expressed more

often in slaves. Following this is another table, by markets of commodities and prices at the middle of the nineteenth century.

TABLE 7: Prices, Commodities and Standard of Value in Aboh

Year	Commodity/ Currency	Price/Standard of Value	Source
1832	1 puncheon of oil	1 slave	Laird/Oldfield, I, p. 320
1832	2 jackets, 2 muskets, and "some yards of cloth"	1 male slave	Laird/Oldfield, I, p. 103
1832	1 male slave	60 shillings	Laird/Oldfield, I, p. 103
1832	1 ton of palm oil	80 shillings	Laird/Oldfield, I, p. 103
1854	10-12 bags of salt	1 male slave	Baikie, p. 317
1854	60,000-70,000 cowries	1 male slave	Baikie, p. 317
1854	8-12 bags of salt	1 female slave	Baikie, p. 317
1854	45,000-50,000 cowries	1 female slave	Baikie, p. 317
1854	8,000-9,000 cowries	1 musket	Baikie, pp. 293-4
1854	1 pair ivory anklets	4 slaves	Baikie, pp. 301-2
1854	1 fowl	2,000 cowries	Baikie, pp. 293-4

TABLE 8: Commodities and Prices in Various Lower Niger Markets

Year	Market	Commodity	Price	Source
1832	Idah	"Prime Slave"	$5 or goods of that value	Laird & Oldfield, Vol. 1, p. 124
1832	Idah	1 lb. dry tobacco	100 cowries	Laird & Oldfield, Vol. 1, p. 164
1854	Idah	1 cup of salt	250-300 cowries	Baikie, p. 109
1854	Idah	1 young slave	50,000 cowries or 60-80 shillings	Baikie, p. 275
1854	Idah	11 lb. dry tobacco	1000 cowries	Baikie, p. 74
1854	Idah	1 musket	10,000-12,000 cowries	Baikie, p. 293-4
1854	Igbegbe	1 tusk, weight 87 lbs.	37,000 cowries & some red cloth	Baikie, p. 269
1832	Kiri	Bullocks 60-120 lbs.	Cowries: 12,000-20,000	Laird & Oldfield, Vol. 1, p. 169
1832	Kiri	Goats, 15 lbs.	1,000-1,500 cowries	Laird & Oldfield, Vol. 1, p. 169
1832	Kiri	Leopard skins	2,500-3,000 cowries	Laird & Oldfield, Vol. 1, p. 169
1832	Kiri	Fish (day's supply)	1 handkerchief	Laird & Oldfield, Vol. I, p. 169
1832	Kiri	Rice, small grass bag, wt. 2	1 flint per bag	Laird & Oldfield, Vol. I, p. 169
1832	Kiri	1 fowl	100 cowries	Laird & Oldfield, Vol. I, p. 170
1832	Kiri	1 horse, small breed	60,000 cowries or 60 shillings	Laird & Oldfield, Vol. I, p. 167

Year	Market	Commodity	Price	Source
1832	Kiri	2 tusks, weight 11-1/2	9 cotton handkerchiefs 1 cutlass or 4/4d	Laird & Oldfield, Vol. I, p. 167
1832	Kiri	2 tusks, weight 18	2 yds of cloth velvet 4 handkerchiefs or 5/6d	Laird & Oldfield, Vol. I, p. 167
1832	Kiri	1 tusk, wt. 30	3 yds of red cloth, 11,000 cowries or 14 shillings	Laird & Oldfield, Vol. I, p. 167
1832	Kiri	1 tusk, wt. 30	4 yds. of scarlet cloth 1 looking glass, or about 7 shillings	Laird & Oldfield, Vol. I, p. 167
1832	Kiri	1 tusk, wt. 40	4 yds of red velvet six yds of scarlet cloth; about 16.5 sterling	Laird & Oldfield, Vol. I, p. 167
1832	Kiri	1 tusk, wt. 68	48,000 cowries & 7 red caps or 6d per lb.	Laird & Oldfield, Vol. II, p. 326
1832	Kiri	1 tusk, wt. 30	35,000 cowries	Laird & Oldfield, Vol. II, p. 326
1832	Fundah	copper pipe bowls	500 cowries	Laird & Oldfield, Vol. I, p. 231
1832	Adassah	female slave	30,000 cowries or 30 shillings	Laird & Oldfield, Vol. I, p. 243

Profits in the system of trade outlined came mainly from two inter-related spheres of operation. A profit margin which eludes quantification was made out of local purchase. Trading commodities--palm-oil, ivory, etc. were paid for in the neighboring markets mainly in salt and cowries. Manufactured goods received from the coastal merchants were also used, but these entered the system, from the point of view of the Aboh merchants, as commodities for sale, at a relatively higher price. Since cowries and salt which the Aboh give out are redundant, exchange for manufactures had to be effected with produce. The second sphere involved the resale of produce procured with salt and cowries on the one hand, and for a small outlay of manufactures. Another source of a built in profit was the trust system. Admittedly, 'credit' trading involved an element of risk since the merchant pledged himself to deliver a specified quantity of produce in return for the goods granted as trust. But the system also enabled him to fix the prices of the commodities to be delivered beforehand, and there can be no doubt that the trust receiver cushioned himself against loss.

Overall profit is difficult to calculate where there is so much deficiency in data. From the price of piece goods in the markets of the north, it is obvious that the Aboh merchants came out well. For example, a 'prime' slave in the markets of Igala cost £2 or 50,000 cowries. At Adassah in the confluence, a slave sold for 30,000 cowries or 30 shillings. The resale value of a slave at Aboh was however 60,000-70,000

cowries or approximately 60-80 shillings. Exclusive of operating cost; and other expenses, which cannot now be determined, one slave could be expected to fetch a profit of 50 percent, and in some cases, as high as 75 percent.

The trade in muskets provides another index of profit. The general sterling value of cowries on the Niger was said to be between 1/6^{d} - 2/- per 1,000 cowries. At the former price, a musket was worth 8,000-9,000 cowries or an average of 13/6. The Aboh resold them at Idah and beyond for anything between 10,000 and 12,000 cowries or an average of 17/6 sterling per musket. The profit margin for each musket was thus 4 shillings or about 33 percent of the cost price.

Profit in the resale of palm-oil is more difficult to calculate, since there exist no data on the price Aboh retailed this commodity in the interior. The coastal merchants paid about £4 per ton of oil at Aboh, reselling this to the supercargoes at about £20, i.e. a profit of about 400 percent. While there is little evidence to go by, it is safe to assume that the Aboh resold their oil at a price which allowed them a profit margin of some 30 percent. This assumes that they derived as much profit in this trade as in the trade in slaves and muskets.

Considering the total volume of all the commodities traded, and a profit margin of at least 30 percent on total resale, it is obvious that the principal merchants, who were involved in the primary export sector, made cnnsiderable profit from trade. Much of this profit was however reinvested in capital equipment and in prestige projects. The principal objective

of an average Aboh merchant in the nineteenth century was to expand his trading concern, and this involved him in the acquisition of more slaves, wives, war canoes, cannons and guns. This outlay enabled some of the more successful ones to establish their own 'compounds' to acquire 'titles' and to play very important roles in both the defense and politics of the kingdom.

In this chapter we have been concerned with an analysis of the trading system of the Niger Valley. The evidence polled seems to indicate that the city of Aboh played a very important role in this network, and that her merchants secured considerable profit from this trade. In the next chapter, attention will be directed to the impact of European penetration of the Niger on Aboh trade. The political implications of this phenomenon will also be examined.

NOTES

[1]Alagoa, "Long-Distance Trade and States in the Niger Delta," pp. 319-321.

[2]G. Kimble (trans.), Esmeraldo de situ orbis by Duarte Pacheco Pereira (London, 1937), pp. 131-2, cited in Jones, The Trading States, p. 33.

[3]J. Adams, Sketches Taken During Ten Years Voyage to Africa Between the Years 1786-1800 (London, n.d.), pp. 33-8, cited in Dike, Trade and Politics, p. 22.

[4]Alagoa, "Long-Distance Trade and States in the Niger Delta," p. 325.

[5]Lander and Lander, op. cit., 2, p. 256.

[6]Laird and Oldfield, op, cit., 1, p. 74 and pp. 379-80.

[7]Allen and Thomson, op. cit., 1, p. 171.

[8]Lander and Lander, op, cit., 2, p. 254.

[9]Ibid., p. 237.

[10]Interview with informant No. 8, in Appendix A, Ashaka, Jan. 1970.

[11]Allen and Thomson, op. cit., 1, p. 265.

[12]Laird and Oldfield, op.cit., 2, p. 321-3.

[13]Hutchinson, op. cit., pp. 160-1.

[14]Laird and Oldfield, op, cit., 1, p. 115.

[15]Sir George Stephen, The Niger Trade Considered in Connection with the African Blockade (London, 1849), p. 41.

[16]Lander and Lander, op, cit., 2, p. 218.

[17]Interview with No. 12, in Appendix A, Ashaka, December, 1969.

[18]Kwale District, File No. 62/1, D.O. Kwale, to Resident, July 24, 1928.

[19]Supra, p.

[20]Allen and Thomson, op. cit., 2, p. 230.

[21]Ibid., p. 232. Also Schon and Crowther, op. cit., p. 57. The war deity, according to Rev Schon was made of

wood, and located in the inner courtyard. It held a pistol in his left hand and a sword in his right hand. "It is considered the God of War. In time of war every soldier is obliged, before he departs for the fight, to lay his hands upon the idol, who perserves him and enables him to return to safety."

[22]The Laird expedition of 1832 bore witness to some of these raids which resulted in the burning of villages along the Benue. See for example, Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., 1, pp. 246-8. For a Fulani account of these raids, see M. Smith, Baba of Karo (New York, 1964), pp. 33-9, 66-7.

[23]F. O. 97/434, No. 17, Baikie to Lord Russel, March 13, 1862.

[24]Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., 1, p. 126, 130.

[25]Curtin and Vansina, "Sources of the Nineteenth Century Atlantic Slave Trade," Journal of African History, 5 (1964), pp. 185-208. See also Curtin, The Atlantic Slave Trade (Madison, 1969), pp. 251-255.

[26]Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., 1, p. 234.

[27]Ibid., pp. 322-3.

[28]Allen and Thomson, op. cit., 1, p. 267.

[29]Ibid., pp. 248-9.

[30]Richard and John Lander, op. cit., 2, p. 216.

[31]Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., 1. pp. 350-2.

[32]Allen and Thomson, op. cit., 1. p. 221.

[33]Ibid., p. 239.

[34]C.O. 2/24. Encl. P. in No. 52. Captain Trotter to Lord Stanley, March 15, 1843.

[35]F.O. 2/34, No. 2, Baikie to Lord Russel, Feb. 28, 1860.

[36]Cole, op. cit., p. 124.

[37]The Aje who signed the treaty was the brother of Obi Ossai, not his son.

[38]F.O. 97/433, Commander Douglas to Commodore Edmonstone, Sept. 26, 1860.

[39]Ibid.

[40]F.O. 84/2109, "Report of Major C. Macdonald, " Jan. 9, 1890.

[41]Ibid., Mr. Enwefa Akpati, of Ndoni informed the writer that at the close of the last century, about the time Macdonald seems to be writing, he attended the slave market at Asaba, then known as Ojioma. To this market, Igala traders brought slaves. They also brought slaves to the market at Atani. Some of the more affluent Igala wholesalers bought about forty slaves per head. The slaves were usually made to sit on the beach in groups, but rose to be 'medically' checked by prospective buyers. According to Mr. Akpati, a male slave cost between £10 and £15, and females between £3 and £6. They were resold to the Delta peoples.

[42]Curtin, The Atlantic Slave Trade, pp. 231-264, 267.

[43]Lander and Lander, op. cit., 2, p. 218.

[44]Hutchinson, op. cit., p. 44.

[45]Lander and Lander, op. cit., 2, p. 218.

[46]Dike, op. cit., p. 41.

[47]Ibid., pp. 100-101.

[48]Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., 2, p. 333.

[49]Schon and Crowther, op. cit., p. 232.

[50]Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., 1, p. 103.

[51]Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., 2, p. 165.

[52]Allen and Thomson, op.cit., 2, p. 194.

[53]Larid and Oldfield, op. cit., 1, p. 165.

[54]Ibid., p. 342.

[55]Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., 2, p. 143.

[56]Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., 1, p. 341.

[57]Dike, op. cit., pp. 99-100.

[58]Mokler-Ferryman, op. cit., p. 16.

[59]F.O. 84/1087, No. 77. Consul Hutchinson to the Earl of Malmasbury, Feb. 24, 1859.

[60]Ibid. The trouble continued after Hutchinson's intervention. In October 1871, a treaty was concluded between new Calabar (Kalabari) and Bonny. The 8th clause stipulated that "The King and Chiefs of New Calabar shall open the creeks leading to Brass and Bonny and shall not prevent the Akassa Brass men from passing through with their canoes but shall give them safe convoy." See Jones, Trading States of the Oil Rivers, Appendix B, pp. 233-5.

[61]Cole, op. cit., p. 185.

[62]For the developments leading to the Akassa war, See Alagoa, The Small Brave City - State, pp. 91-116; also J. E. Flint, Sir George Goldie, pp. 187-215.

[63]C. O. 392/3. Barthust to Clapperton, July 20, 1825.

[64]Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., 2, p. 121.

[65]Ifemesia, op. cit., p. 20.

[66]C. O. 2/24, No. 26. Dispatch from Her Majesty's Commissioners to the Expedition to the Niger, to Lord Russel, August 30, 1841.

[67]Allen and Thomson, op. cit., 1, p. 237.

[68]Hubbard, op. cit., p. 31. Also confirmed by oral evidence; interview with No. 12, in Appendix A, Ashaka, January, 1970.

[69]Kwale District, 14/1, Records of Miscellaneous Minutes and Correspondence, 1907-8.

[70]C. O. 2/24, No. 52, Captain Trotter to Lord Stanley, Mar. 15, 1843.

[71]Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., 1, p. 98.

[72]Ibid., p. 166.

[73]Ibid., p. 165.

[74]C. O. 2/24, No. 55, W. Cook to Lord Stanley, March 11, 1843.

[75]Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., 1, pp. 151-2

[76]Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., 2, p. 178.

[77]Ibid., p. 181. See also C. O. 2/24. Enclosure 3 in Allen to Stanley, Feb. 5, 1843.

[78]Baikie, op. cit., p. 300.

[79]Ibid.

[80]Allen and Thomson, op. cit., 2, p. 200.

[81]Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., 2, p. 147.

[82]Schon and Crowther, op. cit., p. 41.

[83]C. O. 2/24. No. 52. Captain Trotter to Lord Stanley, March 15, 1843.

[84]C. O. 2/24. No. 23. Dispatch from Her Majesty's Commissioners to Lord John Russel, August 30, 1841.

[85]Allen and Thomson, op. cit., 2, p. 237.

[86]Baikie, op, cit., p. 293.

[87]Laird and Oldfield, op, cit., 1, p. 388.

[88]Lander and Lander, op. cit., 2, pp. 202-204.

[89]Ibid., p. 204.

[90]See Dike op. cit., pp. 90-3, 102-4, 108-127; Alagoa, The Small Brave City - State, pp. 70-71, and Jones, The Trading States, pp. 96-99.

[91]Ifemesia, op. cit., p. 261.

[92]Ryder, op. cit., pp. 78, 130-8.

[93]See for example, Cole, op. cit., p. 63.

[94]Baikie, op. cit., p. 317.

[95]Ryder, op cit., pp. 60-1, also Marion Johnson, "The cowrie currencies of West Africa, Part I," Journal of African History, XI, I (1970), p. 18. Citing Ryder, "An Early Portuguese Trading Voyage to the Forcados River," Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, I, 4 (1959), 301n.

[96]See for example, Dike op cit., p. 107. Johnson, "The Cowrie Currencies of West Africa, Part I," seems to support the hypothesis that cowries spread inland from the coast in the nineteenth century. See especially p. 35.

[97]Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., 2, p. 181.

[98]Ibid., p. 317.

[99]Baikie, op. cit., p. 114. Also Appendix B, p. 416.

[100]Laird and Oldfield, op. cit., 1, p. 271.

CHAPTER SEVEN

EUROPEAN ACTIVITIES ON THE NIGER AND THE DECLINE OF ABOH 1857-1900

The fourth decade of the nineteenth century was a trying period for trade and political stability on the Niger Valley. Early in 1840, Ata Amochejje of Igala died, leaving behind a state rent by a dispute over who should succeed to the throne.[1] Four years later, Obi Ossai I of Aboh died. The death of the two most powerful monarchs on the Niger Valley may be regarded as marking the end of one era and the beginning of another. The former because inspite of European ambitions on the Niger in the 1830's, the traditional pattern of trade remained inviolate. The state systems about which this trade revolved remained powerful and flourished economically. The beginning of a new epoch because the 1850's witnessed a vigorous revival of European interest in the Niger. The system of direct trade which the Europeans initiated not only overturned the old pattern of commerce, it undermined one of the foundations of the traditional power structure of the Niger Valley port kingdoms - wealth from the monopoly of trade.

Obi Ossai's death was doubly tragic for Aboh. It removed a powerful influence at a crucial period of the kingdom's

history. Worse still, it was accompanied by a protracted succession dispute, with far flung repercussion for the entire Niger Valley. Thus, only a short eighteen months after Obi Ossai's death, Dr. King of the Consulate at Fernando Po noted that the Kingdom of Aboh was in decline, and that the entire country from the sea upwards was in a terrible state of disorder.[2]

Contrary to usage Obi Ossai had designated Chukwumah, his eldest son, as king after him, but once his influence was gone, his injunctions were quietly set aside. As a matter of fact, the king's brother and chief of the village of Onya joined the opponents of the prince in rejecting his candidature.[3] The anti-Chukwumah movement must have been popular, for in 1854 Ali, who was very intimately connected with Obi Ossai's lineage, told Thomas Hutchinson that Chukwumah "was not considered by the people as competent to hold the sovereignty."[4] Whether or not Chukwumah actively sought the crown may never be known. He seemed to have been supplanted early in the race by his half brother Nwadei Aje.

Born about 1816, Ajie was about 28 years of age when Obi Ossai died,[5] but inspite of his apparent youthfulness, he was the richest of the Ossai children. Of excellent physic, he stood over six feet tall and weighed over 200 pounds. Aje was both energetic and domineering. In his manner and countenance Aje was said to resemble his father the late Obi Ossai.[6] His voice, Allen tells us, was unusually strong and sonorous, and his appearance exceptionally commanding.[7]

It was perhaps little surprising that Aje was said to be preferred by the supporters of Obi Ossai to Chukwumah whom Baikie found to be "a little oldish looking .... of easy disposition and not much intellect."[8]

According to Hutchinson, Ajie had

> the appearance of being very superior to his brother... and has an air of business about him which in the other [i.e. Chukwumah] is completely lacking.9

Aje's opponent was Olise, a descendant of Obi Ojugbali I and founder of the sector of Umuojugbali. How old Olise was at the beginning of this contest is not known, but traditions say that he was a great warrior and like Aje, successful in trade. In point of fact, the Aboh preserve his name in the traditions as Olise mgbi ogwu i.e. "Olise the great warrior", and there are told to this day stories of his single handed exploits on the Niger.[10]

With Aje as the contestant from the Umuozegbe sector and Olise from Umuojugbali, it is little wonder that the contest extended over a considerable number of years. Few people in Aboh would wish to recount the events following Obi Ossai's death. Those who know the tradition merely say that "terrible" things happened in the contest involving Aje and Olise. A few would go so far as to say that countless 'wars' were fought between the supporters of both camps. That the period was one of great tension and strife is borne out by the fact that ten years after the death of Obi Ossai, the throne had not yet been filled.

> "Since Obi's death", wrote Crowther, "there has been some dispute as to his successor. There is another party beside the line of Obi Ossai's family which lays claim to the throne, ... the line of Oshiodapara. Obi's eldest son who has the right to the throne is Tshukuma, otherwise called Okurobi [Okpalaobi], but he appears to lack energy, so that Ajie his younger brother, an active man took the lead, as it appears with the approbation of Tshukuma; but the line of Oshiodapara contended for the throne in favour of one Orise[Olise]. Ajie heads one party of the town called the king's party, and Olise the other party called the Oshiodapara party"11

In order not to offend the contending parties, the Isagba of Aboh, described by Crowther as "neutral" and "not immediately connected with either side", presided over the affairs of the kingdom. All domestic matters were referred to the Isagba, but Aje was also said to be in control of "all foreign and war-like affairs."[12] Initially therefore it would appear that Aje had the better of his opponent. In point of fact, Baikie, writing in 1854, observed that Aje was much favoured to be elected King of Aboh.[13] Yet Aje was never King of Aboh, and in the end, Olise was confirmed in the office.

At what stage of this long contest Olise assumed office is not known. Bernard Obi asserts that Olise was not popular, and was consequently not acknowledged as King by all. Very serious exception, he claims was taken by the Umuozegbe patrilineage to which Aje belonged.[14] This was only to be expected. But even in 1857, the issue seem not to have been resolved. Aje was much in the race, for when in

August of that year Crowther visited Aboh, he reported that the people were unwilling to grant Aje the Obiship, although they clearly admired his activity in public affairs, and would only grant him equality with the other chiefs.[15] Cole who lived in Aboh between 1859 and 1860, made no reference to anyone as the King of Aboh.

> "it must be understood", wrote Cole, "that the town of Aboh is divided and two scoundrels usurp the monarchical authority. These fellows are powerful and love murder and rapine .... nana Sahib of Cownpore notoriety is no bad idea of what either of these chiefs would be if their power was unlimited".[16]

From Cole's writings, it would seem that Aje was the dominant figure in Aboh history in the late 1850's, even though he was not de jure king. "Aboh", Cole once wrote, "is in the hands of the usurper Aje", and it says much for the latter's influence that the section of Aboh under the control of Olise was described by Cole as "Aboh minor" or "Aboh the less".[17] In point of fact, Aje resisted Obi Olise's use of the official palace located in Onuobikwu. A new palace had therefore to be built for him in the Umuogwezi sector.[18] It was only after Aje's death that the original palace was re-opened for use by later Obi.

The career of Aje provides a striking parallel to that of King Jaja of Opobo a decade later. An Ibo slave of exceptional ability, Jaja rose to become the head of the Anna Pepple house. In this position, he found himself leading the opposition to another ex-slave and leader of the Manilla

Pepple house who was nevertheless in control of the internal affairs of Bonny. The king of Bonny, George Pepple was reported to be a weak character who very largely carried out the behests of Oko Jumbo. Late in 1869, the explosive situation resulted in a civil war, which nonetheless ended abruptly when Jaja withdrew to establish his own state of Opobo in the Andoni country. Fourteen of the eighteen houses in Bonny had gone with Jaja to found Opobo which succeeded in the 1870's in destroying Bonny's stronghold in the Delta trade. In Aboh as in Bonny, the struggle with the established authority weakened the institution of kingship. Of greater moment, it undermined the traditional power structure, denied access to trade to this structure, and greatly facilitated the decline of both kingdoms.[19]

The effect of such a prolonged dispute, during which time, sections fought one another may well be imagined. Internally, the prestige and office of Obi was shaken, and central power was well nigh obliterated. Thus, in 1857 when a quarrel broke out between a division of Aboh, presumably Olise's half, and Ossomari, Aje refused to participate in any campaign "because his mother was from Ossomari".[20] The chaos contrasted so sharply with the order and security of Obi Ossai's reign that Crowther could note that "every headman [was] master in his own quarter."[21]

Externally, the absence of an effective central power, provided a signal for separatist movements. Baikie observed that the sovereignty of the Obi of Aboh had been in abeyance

since the death of Obi Ossai. He went on:

> many towns which were under his rule have ceased to pay tribute; and have become independent.[22]

Among the tributary towns and villages to have cast off Aboh's authority were Inam, Nsugbe and Ossomari.[23] There were certainly many more, and it is probable that many of the Ukwuani villages, northwest of Aboh ceased paying tribute to Aboh at about this time.[24]

Perhaps the greatest disaster of the mid-century was the new trade policy of the British. The disasters suffered by Captain Trotter's expedition of 1841, and the pressures exerted by the Liverpool coastal interests served to delay the implementation of inland trade. Nevertheless a new expedition was despatched up the Niger in 1854.[25] When in July of 1854, Dr. William Balfour Baikie reached Aboh, both Olise and Ajie were away at Idah settling a dispute not unconnected with trade. The expedition was received by Chukwumah, who expressed his delight at seeing "a large ship" at Aboh once again. Apparently, the Aboh had given up hope of ever receiving the trade ships which Obi Ossai had striven so hard to attract. Chukwumah expressed his regret that the white men had made several promises of trade with Aboh which were never fulfilled.

It must be stressed, and here perhaps is the crux of the problem, that Obi Ossai and other proponents of direct trade with Europeans were under the illusion that the Europeans would establish trade only at Aboh, leaving the areas further

north to them. Thus, inspite of the friendship between the Aboh and Igala, Chukwumah told Baikie that the 1841 expedition ought not to have gone beyond Aboh and that Trotter's insistence, inspite of advice to the contrary, was the cause of all their misfortunes.[26] Baikie recounted that the only difficulty his expedition encountered at Aboh

> arose from the extremely grasping character of one of the chiefs [Ajie] who was so unwilling that any other district should benefit from our arrival except his own.[27]

In this and subsequent actions the Aboh were, like the coastal peoples, only trying to protect their markets.

As with trade, the Aboh promptly seized the offer of a missionary station. Their attitude was however one of doubt. They had in the past been treated to vain promises of trade, schools and churches, and until these promises were fulfilled, Chukwumah thought that Crowther's words sounded "too good to be true". Crowther left Simon Jonas, who was by now very well known in Aboh, to commence missionary work. This time Jonas spent about three months during which he travelled extensively in the kingdom. Jonas reported that he was

> sent for by different chief in the town, for conversation, and to ascertain whether what was said respecting our intention to form an establishment at Aboh was likely to be carried out.

Jonas found the people of Aboh "teachable, inquisitive and attentive, noting that much good work might be done if proper attention was paid.[28]

Crowther acquired a piece of land and requested the people to assemble materials so that no delay might be experienced when the time arrived to build the station. That Aje was put in charge of the site is perhaps an indication of his preponderance over his rival Olise, but it must be stressed that the town was split by the dispute over the throne, and visitors to Aboh usually stopped first at Onuobikwu. Olise's sector of Umuojugbali or Umuogwezi where he had his palace, was about a mile away, and most expeditions never got beyond Aje's sector. But Crowther could not acceed to the wishes of the Aboh people i.e. to establish at Aboh and no where else. Like Schon, Crowther thought that Aboh was not healthy enough.

Instead of being the main link between the interior and the European, and the centre of evangelization on the Niger, the new station would be manned by native missionaries who would receive occasional visits from "the upper and healthier parts of the country".[29] The reference was to Onitsha which both Crowther and Baikie had found to be "the key to the extensive Igbo districts and the proper spot for a trading nucleus".[30] In loosing the priority position for a mission station, Aboh lost one more dice in her desparate game - monopoly of inland trade with Europeans.

One reason the successors of Obi Ossai jumped with much eagerness at the opportunity which they believed Baikie's expedition offered, was the general belief that here at last

was the opportunity to extricate Aboh from the difficulties into which Ossai's extreme measures had placed it. The Aboh merchants continued to visit the markets of the north, but it is doubtful if they exported much to the coast. As was earlier noted Obi Ossai, who suspected King Boy's complecancy in Mr. Carr's murder, had placed an embargo on trade with the Brass. At the time, he probably thought little of his action. After all, his treaty with Queen Victoria had been ratified, and he was expecting trading vessels. Did it matter if he lost his Brass customers? As has been noted however, the plan for direct trade had been shelved, owing to a combination of circumstances. By the time Obi Ossai died in December 1844, no trade ship had arrived.

His successors therefore decided to resucitate the trade with Brass. Trade was re-opened in 1851, but King Boy had died in 1846, and Aboh-Brass relations was never what it was in the past. On one occasion, the relationship between the Aboh and Brass became so strained, the former confiscated trade goods belonging to Brass. The Brass merchants retaliated by carrying off several Aboh canoes. After this incident trade appeared to have come to a standstill until 1853 when the Aboh were forced to attempt a reconciliation. In 1854, when Baikie reached Aboh, the two Chiefs deputed to Brass to effect a settlement had still not returned to Aboh owing to "various diplomatic difficulties and delay".[31]

Relations with her northern neighbours were no better.

In 1851 when Aboh had barely succeeded in re-establishing trade with Brass, she became involved in a war with Nupe over which Masaba ruled. The cause of the conflict is obscure, but according to Baikie, the Aboh killed a total of twelve Nupe, suffering the loss of only one of their men.[32] If Baikie's account is any thing to go by, it would seem that Aboh was still a strong force on the Niger, inspite of her internal problems. But these pressure from the north and south must have made the reappearance of European ships in 1854 a most welcome sight.

Even so, it was not until July 1857 that the first English trading post was established at Aboh. Ever since Baikie returned to England from his highly successful expedition, Macgregor Laird had launched a strong campaign for a Government subsidy to enable him establish a regular mail service and trade on the Niger Valley. Laird succeeded in obtaining the subsidy in January 1857, but misfortune befell the maiden voyage. The Dayspring, commanded by the now renowned Dr. Baikie, was wrecked on the juju rock at Jebba. Baikie immediately established a settlement at Lokoja from where he began a systematic exploration of the surrounding country. The main objective of the voyage of the Dayspring, as Professor Flint noted, had been to establish trade in the confluence. But it was soon discovered that palm-oil trade was far more profitable. Whereas the hulk at Lokoja made little profit, those moored at Aboh and Onitsha did a brisk

trade.[33]

Crowther and Baikie's bias against Aboh (for health and geographical reasons) had no doubt influenced Laird's thinking. His instruction to Captain Alexander Grant (his agent) was to establish the first factory "about 160 miles" from the sea, an obvious reference to Onitsha, and the second one at the Benue Confluence. The Onitsha factory was to be known as Lairdsport, and the latter, Lairdstown.[34] The importance of Aboh as a central collecting depot for the palm-oil of the surrounding country was soon recognized, and towards the end of 1857, a factory was built there.

The event proved to be as auspicious as it was disastrous. Established twenty five long years after Obi Ossai initially endorsed the policy, the factory marked a watershed in the economic and political history of Aboh. From the fever-pitch enthusiasm earlier observed for European friendship and direct trade, Anglo-Aboh relation began a steady deterioration. The chiefs of Aboh had come to see direct trade for what it truly was - a danger to the position of Aboh as the middleman entreport on the Niger. One act of hostility followed another until in the end, the factory was destroyed, and British might defied.

In their naivety, the chiefs had thought that Aboh would become the base of European trade on the Niger. When Crowther and J. C. Taylor intimated Aje of their intention to establish stations at Onitsha and Asaba, he registered

his oppostion to the idea. Aje told the missionaries that he was at war with both places, and demanded certain payments before he could consider the matter.[35] He had grudgingly allowed Ali, the Hausa slave of Obi Ossai, and pilot to the various expeditions, to accompany the mission to Onitsha, but the latter deserted as soon as he reached Onitsha. According to Crowther, Ali was afraid of

> involving himself in trouble with Aje who was opposed to our establishments at Onitsha as lending a helping hand to accomplish what he [Aje] opposed as being against the trading interest of his people.[36]

Chukwumah was later to confess to Crowther that they had all stood against the idea because "Onitsha was their chief oil market and by [their] establishment there, [they] should cut them off from all supplies of oil".[37]

Initially, the Aboh seemed to have decided to endure what they could not cure. Trade had been conducted with the factory which was at first under the management of Mr. George Lyall. But the Aboh people also set aside the anti-slave trade treaty of 1841. They must have found justification for continuing the slave trade with the Brass in the great dent which the main factory at Onitsha was making in their palm-oil trade.

George Lyall probably kept no journal. If he did, it has not come down to us. It becomes difficult to assess the volume of the factory trade in Aboh. All the Niger factories together - those at Aboh, Onitsha, and Lokoja -

realized £1,800 in 1857, £2,750 in 1858; and £8,000-£9,000 in 1859.[38] Aboh's contribution to this total is a matter for speculation, but it must have been considerable. According to William Cole, "there was a wide field open for the successful issue of trading. The only things necessary were skillful and energetic assistants and a lot of provisions".[39]

He had himself done some good trading, and felt able to pass to his successors, techniques for conducting trade with the Aboh people. In trading for oil at Aboh, Cole found the ruling motto to be "Every man for himself, God for us all". The trader, he advised, must not treat his customer with contempt, no matter how poorly dressed for

> he may possess a puncheon or two of oil and yet brings you but a couple of pots, which are .... a shrewed test of your trading capabilities.

The trader must also not name his price in a hurry, but "beat about the bush", until a market value is secured. He must always make use of his penetration and sagacity or else he may be the looser. "The negro", concluded Cole, "has a wit of his own, and has discretion enough to use it."[40]

Inspite of the robust state of trade, Cole had always to contend with Aje who had clearly emerged as the leader of the party opposed to the continued British presence at Aboh. Aje showed in his treatment of Cole, an utter disregard for friendship with the British. Before Cole was five months old in Aboh, they were both seizing one another's servants, and resorting to the use of arms in their quarrels. On one

occasion, Aje bound Cole's Kroo help in chains, and when the furious Cole boasted that he was "a white man", Aje calmly replied that "white men have died here before". The Aboh chief held up his hand, exhibiting three fingers and musingly said:

> Yes, three of your brothers have been killed and your Queen spoke of revenge, but she does not think of that. All that she requires is plenty of 'ile' (oil).[41]

The climax was reached in February 1860. Aje had been in the habit of eating his breakfast within the comforts of Cole's sitting room on market days. On this occasion, Cole would not allow the chief in, and in the ensuring brawl, Aje swore to burn down the factory. To show how intent he was, Aje despatched a company of some 200 slaves the next day to hold a military parade on the factory grounds.[42]

Baikie, whose headquarters was at Lokoja, was not unmindful of developments at Aboh. In one of his many despatches to Lord Russel, Baikie recommended that Aje who had "assumed the title of King of Aboh", ought to be "more roughly handled". As a matter of fact, Baikie went so far as to recommend a summary destruction of Aboh.[43] He, Baikie, had been informed by George Lyall that the Aboh chiefs looked upon him as "a mythical being", and he therefore hoped to use this to advantage to save the factory, until sterner measures could be taken.

The bouts between Aje and Laird's factory turned out to be an extension of the battle which the coastal middlemen were

engaged in against European penetration of the Niger. Almost every expedition up the Niger had been subject to attack by the coastal Ijo, the reason being that much of the trade which had flowed towards the coast was now intercepted by the interior factories. Richard Lander died of the wounds he received in one such encounter in 1833. In 1857, Laird's vessel, the George was attacked by the people of Agberi, Angiama and Sabogrega. There was a lull in 1858, but in 1859, the attacks were renewed with increased ferocity, as the Ijo sought to prevent the Sunbeam and the Rainbow from ascending the river.[44]

These events, it has been stated, were not unrelated to the various acts of hostility and violence which the Aboh, under Aje's direction, piled on Macgregor Laird's factory. These acts grew from a belated realization that Aboh was in the same category of middleman with the coastal states, and that a proliferation of factories on the Niger was equally harmful to her economic survival. According to Cole, the death of two of the crew of the Rainbow "seems to provoke and stimulate many little acts of bravado" among the Aboh. They had become so "infatuated with the success that crowns the natives of Orue [Brass] that they begin to feel a hankering for some such hostility".[45] Lyall was actually told that with three successive attacks on British shipping, and no efforts at retaliation, they (the Aboh) were convinced that the "whitemen were no better than themselves and

not strong or more brave as they had hitherto considered."[46] Okeyea, Aje's younger brother, and one of the richest and most dreaded chiefs boasted to Cole:

> You build ships and call yourselves whitemen and freeborn, and yet you are afraid to resent the injuries you have received. In course of time, we shall have all of you killed and your ships will remain as islands in the river ..... you talk of what will be done; but talking will not build a town". (italics mine)

One of the ironies of Aboh history thus chanced. Trading ships, which had been open heartedly sought by Obi Ossai, and as late as 1857, were now so detested that they were soon to be "islands in the river".

Interestingly, the new development in Aboh had been aided by some Europeans - Liverpool merchants - who had since the inception of legitimate trade, been in alliance with the coastal middlemen. They too were vehemently opposed to the presence of white traders in the interior. They had invested capital in the existing pattern and were not too concerned with the acclaimed humanitarian ideals of Laird. Lieutenant Glover who was in the Rainbow during its descent in November 1859 attributed the hostility of the Delta Ijo

> to the influence which is exercised by the English traders in the Brass River who are antagonistic to the development of trade in the interior.[48]

Baikie was later informed that sometime in 1860, agents from two British trading houses on the coast:

> hired and sent up to Aboh two canoes laden with goods, tobacco, spirits, wine and even champaigne, most of which were expended in presents and bribes for the purpose of stopping Mr. Laird's trade.

> They bought up also all the palm-oil they could at such price as to quite preclude the possibility of its being done for the mere purpose of trade. The experiment, however, though for a time successful, was apparently, so expensive that it has not been renewed.[49]

Professor Kenneth Dike and Dr. Ifemesia have suggested that the Aboh were instigated by the Brass into obstructing business at the factory. It is however suggested that, was such a policy not found to be in their interest, the people of Aboh would not have formed such a pact with the Brass. A semblance of 'unity' was apparent because the Aboh saw that they were fighting the same 'enemy'.

In the meantime, a solution to the attacks on the vessels was thought to have been found in the provision of naval escorts to ships ascending the Niger.[50] Unfortunately, the escort promised Macgregor Laird in August 1860 was not provided. When help finally came, it proved too late, for the vital decision to destroy the factory at Aboh had already been taken and implemented.

Aje, it has been noted, was extremely forceful and capable. As late as 1859, one half of Aboh, (the larger half from Cole's account) was under his control as was a considerable stretch of the Niger. The people of Asaba exercised little freedom of movement because Aje's war canoes roamed their waters and kidnapped them. In 1857, they strongly beseached Reverend Crowther to establish a station for them in Asaba. Both Crowther and Taylor were

unable to convince them that they could trade with any security at Onitsha.[51] Although not a monarch, Aje controlled the trade of his part of Aboh. Once, according to Cole, he had made an offer to a Brass trader for the entire cargo in his canoe. This was rejected, apparently because the chief offered too little. Aje immediately ordered the Brass trader "to leave Aboh before sundown under the pain of confiscation of self and cargo". The fellow, concluded Cole, got off very slightly, considering Aje's disposition.[52] His control of Okeyea, and another junior brother Uti whom Cole described as being of "immense bulk and proportions" was equally complete. The former was born about 1824, and was said to be "a tall, stout bloustering fellow". An astute and enterprising trader, Okeyea grew very rich, and was consequently respected by the people.[53] Together, the trio ran the affairs of one half of the town, monopolising trade with the factory, and allowing only their supporters to trade there.

By late August of 1860, the relationship between Cole and Aje had so ebbed that Chukwumah, whom Cole described as "the most faithful coloured friend" of the white traders, had to come and live in the factory. Okeyea found cause to quarrel with Cole, and seized the opportunity of his regular commercial trips to Igala to purchase "about 1,000 bows and a compliment of poisoned arrows for the purpose of arming his slaves".[54] Matters came to a head, that Chukwumah finally advised Cole against his continued stay at Aboh.

Thus, an atmosphere of tension could be said to be hanging over the factory system at Aboh in the second half of 1860. The already overcharged clouds descended when rumours began to circulate to the effect that the factory was being closed. On September 9, 1860, a letter had reached Cole from Baikie, advising him to shut the factory, and go with his aids to Onitsha. The goods were entrusted to Chukwumah, and Cole left for Onitsha. On October 21, the cooper whom Cole had left behind at Aboh arrived at Onitsha with a complaint that the factory had been inundated. Cole thereupon hurried to Aboh where he found a good part of the stores in ruins, but some of the property was salvaged the next day, and carried to Chukwumah's residence.

This development was looked upon with grave concern by Okeyea and Uti. The former immediately despatched his slaves to the factory site where they destroyed what was left standing and plundered the factory property. According to Cole, Okeyea removed goods valued at £1,209 9. 10½. As if this was not enough, Okeyea threatened Cole with death. He stationed his slaves at points around Chukwumah's residence, with instructions to shoot him if he dared come out.[55]

In fairness to Aje, it must be said that he was away at Oko when this incident occurred. Dr. Baikie, who had in the meantime received intelligence on the situation at Aboh, approached the Ata of Igala to use his influence to free Cole. The Ata's messengers called at Oko on their way to Aboh. They had seen Aje who "most emphatically disowned the conduct

of Akia", but placed the responsibility on Chukwumah. At Aboh, the Ata's messengers proved unequal to their task, and returned to Idah without Mr. Cole.

There is no doubt that Aje was privy to the plan to destroy the factory, but even if he had no foreknowledge of it, the manner in which he handled the situation laid him bare to suspicion. Immediately upon his return from Oko, Aje demanded all the goods recovered from the factory. His reason for seizing hold of the factory's property was ostensibly the inability or refusal of the British traders to meet the terms of an agreement they had reached with him. Mr. Fairweather, who had been instrumental in the erection of the factory, had agreed to pay Aje the value of 20 puncheons of oil in guns, cloth, and cowries, for the concession to trade at Aboh. Nothing had however been paid to him. After three years of profitable business, the factory seemed to be closing up with nothing of the contractual payments made. Under such circumstances, Aje thought that he was fully justified in claiming whatever he could lay his hands on. Cole, of course, strongly contends that Aje had been fully repaid, but the truth may never be known as all the factory's records were lost in the floods. It would seem that Aje had been paid something in return for British trade at Aboh, although he obviously considered himself as the only judge of how adequate the compensation was.

The hypothesis current about the people of the Niger

Valley is that they wished for nothing more than to establish direct commercial contact with the Europeans who hitherto stopped on the coast. This was the impression under which Macgregor Laird laboured, and the policies of the humanitarians (Buxton, etc.) and the British Foreign Office stemmed from this premise. It was argued that the establishment of direct trade with such inland states as Aboh and Igala would terminate their dependence on the coastal middlemen. In point of fact, the policy of Obi Ossia I seem to have given some credence to this hypothesis.

Neither Laird, nor the humanitarians and the host of legitimate traders, who had the constant support of the British government, seemed to have considered seriously the unique position of these interior states in the trading system of the Niger. Few or none of the states of the interior produced anything. Each one grew up as the nucleus of the trade of its neighbourhood from which goods could be passed on, and other goods received for distribution. Aboh was thus in no better position than the coastal states. As a middleman, how be it an inland one, she was as vulnerable to the penetration of the Niger Valley as Brass, Bonny and Opobo. The economic and political decline which Aboh suffered in the second half of the nineteenth century was the consequence of the opening up of the Niger to European traders in 1857.

The above then would seem to account for Aje's

increasing coldness towards Cole, and the eventual destruction of the factory. As has been emphasized, the Aboh had been deluded into thinking that their city would have the only British trading base, and that the rest of the Niger markets would be secured to them. That the Aboh conceived of the factory as a place in which trade was exclusive to them is borne out by Aje's repeated refusal to allow neighbouring villages to sell their commodities direct to the factory. Thus, he was reported several times to have turned away traders who had come from Ndoni to sell palm-oil to the factory.[56] The establishment at Onitsha, which provided producers further north with an alternative market, both restricted Aboh's sphere of activity and greatly reduced from her economic status as the entrepot of the Niger Valley. In order to restore her former position, the entire factory system of trade had to go.

It is also pertinent to observe that the new system of interior trade was ill-organized and hopelessly inadequate. In February 1860, Lieutenant Glover complained that the smallness of the trade returns for 1857 and 1858 was to be attributed to

> the ill assortment of cargoes landed at the different factories arising from a want of knowledge of the several markets of Ibo [Aboh] Onitsha and confluence.

For a greater part of the period, concluded Glover, no trading was carried on because the factories lacked the requisite goods.[57] Steamships on which the trade depended

paid infrequent visits to the Niger. As a result, Baikie and other agents were starved of provisions. At Aboh, Cole was on occasions constrained to send his "native labourers upon a begging expedition".[58] He characterized the existing system of trade as "unorganized", adding that the Aboh people "are fond of trade, but they like plenty of it, not as we are circumstanced at present".[59] What the Aboh people found most detestable was the periodic character of the trade, and the lack of Europeans manufactures for exchange.

> "During the stay of the ships", wrote Cole, "we are as busy as Beck's wife, but when she has gone with her cargo, the refuse of stock left behind is either unsaleable or too high a figure to be disposed of .... Oil is what we want, and as we carry on trade at present, we shall not have it."[60]

In order to remedy these deficiences, Laird secured the agreement of the British Government to provide naval escort for three voyages into the Niger annually.[61] This contract which was concluded in August 1960, proved laudable only on paper. Commodore Edmonstone, whose responsibility it was to provide the escort, described the venture as "hazardous", and strongly urged the Government to reconsider its decision.[62]

On August 10, 1860, two of Laird's vessels, the Sunbeam and the Rainbow berthed in the Nun, awaiting the arrival of the promised escort. None came.[63] In desperation, Laird auctioned the goods which had been intended for the factories. Valued at £30,000 they would have been a fillip to the inland trade, but the water had begun to fall and acsent was

impossible.

In point of fact, part of the explanation for Okeyea's attack on the factory was to be found in the frustration occasioned by the non-appearance of the vessels in 1860. This meant that the factory was unreplenished for all of 1860, and was to all intent and purposes closed to trade. Many questioned the use of a factory where no trade was carried on. To the Aboh, it seemed that the old pattern of trade had been threatened and close to eclipse even before the new system had been tried out. The spectre of economic decline loomed visibly in the foreground for neither goods nor the "almighty" ships were to be seen. It was little surprise then that the chiefs, frustrated and desperate, lent willing ears to rumours. Baikie actually lay the blame on the non-appearance of the steam ships.

> "Both Mr. Laird's agent and myself", he wrote, "are perfectly satisfied that now trade may be advantageously carried on whenever goods may be sent out. It was only owing to the non-appearance of the steamer and the reports spread by the Brass that they had driven her back by force that the Aboh rose upon Laird's factory".64

Many people in Aboh believed that the Brass had truly succeeded in seizing the steamer. It may even be accounted the immediate cause for Okeyea's reaction. To Mr. Cole, he had boasted:

> As the ship had been taken by the Orue [Brass] people, he [Okeyea] would let the white people know that he was as powerful if not more so than they [Brass] are.65

Even the more peaceful Onitsha had decided that if no vessels

came in 1861, the factory in their country would have to go also.[66]

It is significant to note that hostilities were not restricted to Aboh alone. Careful plans were laid out for the destruction of the factory at Onitsha, and the enforcing of an embargo on trade with the whiteman in all the river. This was revealed to Commander Sholto Douglas and Captain Walker who had entered the Niger in August 1861 to obtain redress for the attacks on British property. The Ijo village group of Kpetema had been burnt during the accent of the Espoir, but Aje seemed not to have been disturbed by the present of a British naval vessel. He rejected all pleas to discuss the factory incident, and boldly announced to Douglas that he would be wasting precious time sending for him because he was not going to make himself available.[67] To prove his point, Aje had been accompanied to the beach by the chiefs and several hundred armed men. Douglas' order was to bombard Aboh, but he considered the task too difficult. Captain Walker confessed that the Commander of the Espoir

> considering the Aboh people to be too powerful for one gun-boat steamed away from Aboh as quickly as possible.[68]

Douglas made an effort to secure the property in Aje's possession, but Mr. Southwick whom he had sent in a galley to collect Aje was lured into the small creek, seized hold of, and inflicted with matchet cuts.

Efforts were concentrated on eliminating the threat posed by the continued presence of a factory at Onitsha. It is not known how the Aboh managed it, but they had probably succeeded in convincing the Onitsha (who were by no means satisfied with the system) that they would be better off without the factory. Fully conscious of the fact that the presence of Europeans and missionaries at Onitsha posed very serious difficulties, the Aboh got the Onitsha to join them in the task of destroying the factory. Only the timely arrival of the Espoir saved the situation.

> "I am glad to state here", Walker had written, "that our arrival at Aboh has been the means of saving Lairdsport factory from being plundered... Tuesday 20th [August] ... being a very large market day, it was previously arranged and peconceived by both the natives of Onitsha and Aboh that if no ships came up to that date, the factory was to be seized, and plundered and the people taken prisoners".69

Onitsha may have ceased paying tribute to the Obi of Aboh, but Aboh was still able to bully her. Thus, when in September 20, 1861 Captain Walker, the Reverend Crowther and Commander Douglas assembled the chiefs of Onitsha to inform them of the decision to close the factory, their fright of Aboh was immediately transparent. According to Walker, the Onitsha chiefs

> expressed their sorrow at our leaving them, and expressed a wish to allow some people to remain at the factory, as they were afraid that the Aboh people would come after our departure and destroy the factory, and that they [Aboh] were stronger than the Onitsha people.70

Equally successful was the embargo which Aboh declared on British trade on the Niger. Douglas had observed that most of the towns between Aboh and Onitsha, with the exception of Ndoni were under the influence of Aboh.[71] Captain Walker visited Oko where he invited the people to open trade at Onitsha, but "they declined to come .... [because] King Aje has influenced them to stop trade with us". Aje had also stopped the Asaba from going to trade at Onitsha as a result of which Walker's "trading operations have been very limited".[72]

It might be observed that the presence of the Church Missionary Society headquarters at Onitsha constituted a major obstacle to Aboh's recovery, and her fight against the British on the Niger. A missionary station had been established at Onitsha in 1857 under the supervision of the Reverend J. C. Taylor.[73]

An effort to begin a similar mission at Aboh began and terminated only with the acquisition of a site. This time, the site was placed under the charge of Olise whom, quite significantly, Crowther described as "headman of the other division of Aboh".[74] The people were told to expect ships and missionaries, and that the station would go into operation later that year. But Onitsha continued to claim the preference of the missionaries. One week after Crowther made this promise at Aboh, he told Taylor that only "a small house" was to be erected at Aboh for missionary

occupation during "periodical" visits. To Reverend Taylor, he stressed: "The first and most important place to which your attention should be chiefly directed is Onitsha".[75] From the number one spot, Aboh slid down the scale as the century wore on. In March 1858 when Taylor made his "periodical" visit to Aboh, he found the site flooded, and contended himself with conducting service before some 150 persons in Aje's compound.[76] Nothing else happened until the last decades of the nineteenth century.

The death of Macgregor Laird in January 1861 had produced a glimer of hope for the Aboh. His factories at Onitsha and Lokoja had been closed, and for a time, it appeared as if Aje's strategem had paid off. Even the missionary enterprise was in danger of folding up. The missionaries could not carry on in isolation. They needed a means of communication with the Church Missionary Society headquarters in London, as well as a regular means of obtaining supplies. But even if the missionaries decided to rough it out in isolation, the main danger - the factory - was out of the way, and Aje could well congratulate himself. The chief was however far reduced in health, and died in January 1862.

But even as Aje revelled in his 1860 'coup' the British Government was making up its mind about the Niger. The final decision was to keep the interior open inspite of the opposition of the coastal middlemen and such interior middlemen as the Aboh. The CMS was the first to seek

alternatives. Its agents were determined not to give up the stations on the Niger. Therefore a means had to be found to provide them with supplies. Crowther had suggested that the mission should purchase its own steam vessel and operate the Niger trade in order to cover expenses. The plan was however shelved as the CMS was in no position to finance it.[77]

In August 1863, the Company of African Merchants was incorporated with a capital of £400,000. Its secretary, Alexander Hamilton, applied to the British Government for a subsidy to enable the company continue from where Macgregor Laird had left off.[78] Interestingly, this application was strenously opposed by the coastal Liverpool and Bristol merchants.[79] They had breathed a sigh of relief when the Brass and Chief Aje, as well as the sudden death of Laird, combined to drive their rival from the Niger. They were not about to enthrone another rival.

The new company failed to obtain the subsidy. It however proceeded with its plans, and along with the West African Company opened up trade on the Niger. It was however decided to restrict operations to places with mission stations. This decision, it must be noted, was not arbitrary. The CMS had a strong interest in the West African Company, and as Professor Ade Ajayi noted, the missionaries were prone to using their influence to further the interests of the traders.[80] Among the shareholders of the company, was

Bishop Crowther. The shares were however not his personal property, but the investment of the CMS.[81] Aboh thus found herself in a plight far worse than that which existed before the factory was destroyed. Cut off from the new Niger trade system, Aboh merchants had as early as 1861 begun taking whatever palm-oil they were able to collect to sell at Onitsha. Later, even towns like Ossomari and Oko were provided with factories, thus affording the Niger Valley people more outlets for their produce without recourse to Aboh.

Occuring at a time when the kingdom was without a centralized authority, the economic situation of the 1860's led to a rapid political decline. Aboh no longer served as the main channel through which other inland peoples received European manufactures and arms. Instead, she now had to obtain her supplies from the new factory towns, with Onitsha, her major rival, as the center of both commerce and missionary work on the Niger. From the 1860's onwards, inland trade became more firmly entrenched as coastal trade declined, and the Obi and people of Aboh had perforce to adjust to the new situation.

II

The records are disappointingly silent on the role Olise (whom the Aboh regard as Obi) played in the crisis that had ended with Aje's death. The death of his

opponent no doubt eased some of the tension and healed much of the divisive politics of the preceeding decade. If Aje's personality detracted from his status, Obi Olise certainly took over Aboh's foreign policy after January of 1862. Olise's primary consideration was to reach a rapport with the British. The Obi, like the Brass probably had no alternative, for in the long run, he could have been bent by British might. On the other hand, his quarrel with Aje, and the fact that the latter had been responsible for the alienation of the British, may have contributed to this change in policy. Thus in 1863, when the British, reacting to the sudden presence of the French at the Nun, decided to renew contacts with the rulers of the Niger, Obi Olise quickly seized the opportunity to get on the British bandwagon.

In September 1863, Obi Olise signed a new treaty with the British which prohibited the slave trade and human sacrifice in Aboh. It also guaranteed protection to English merchants and missionaries, and stipulated that "England and Englishmen are to have first consideration in all trade transactions". Obi Olise also promised not to enter into any treaty relations with other European nationals "without the full understanding and consent of the British Government". The concessions were acquired rather cheaply, for the Obi received in return goods valued at only nine shillings.[82]

In the midst of the uncertainties of the 1860's, Obi Olise was taken ill. He had been taken to his mother's villages of Uru Ebor in Ibrede (Isoko), but the king died shortly after and was buried outside his capital. It is not known when Obi Olise died, but it may have occured in 1865.

His successor was OBI OJUGBALI II, a son of Aje Ugboma of Umuozegbe and brother of the late Obi Ossai I. Traditions say that the succession was not disputed. If this is true, it might be suggested that the people had become painfully aware of the political reverses consequent upon the disputes of the preceeding reign, and had decided to close ranks. It is significant that the crown reverted this time to Aje's lineage, and indeed, to his first cousin.

At what time Ojugbali ascended the throne may never be known with any certainty. It is known from missionary records that Obi Imegwu (referred to as 'Bomar' in the Church Missionary Society records) who succeeded Ojugbali II, was elected well before 1883 when Bishop Crowther reached Aboh.[83] Therefore, his predecessor was king between 1865 when Obi Olise died, and 1881. Allowing for an undetermined interregnum, the most probable dates for Obi Ojugbali's reign would be anywhere between 1870 and 1880. Tradition specifically mentions that Ojugbali had a 'short' reign, but only further research can fit this into the ten year maximum suggested above.

The Aboh say that several wars were fought during the reign of Obi Ojugbali II.[84] The greatest of these was the 'Anam War'. Weakened by the struggles of the preceeding reign, the Aboh had lost the control of the Niger river. The Anam Igbo of the Anambra who live north of Onitsha, and formerly tributary to Obi Ossai I, now all but barred the Aboh from trading to Igala. Intermittent attacks by the Anam had been regarded as an integral part of the trips to the northern markets, but in the 1870's, they had become sustained and something of a nuisance. Ojugbali's first efforts were accordingly directed at clearing this menace. A massive naval force under the leadership of Ogwu Aje was sent against the Anam, whose general was slain in a duel with Ogwu Aje. Part of the trophy of the Anam War were two giant canoes which the Aboh people nicknamed 'Anam'. These were reputed by eye witnesses to have been the largest canoes ever seen in Aboh. The two canoes, though in disuse, were still to be seen in the Aboh Creek in the late 1920's.[85] The Anam War, concluded by a treaty, the site of which is to this day the reminder of the historic battle, turned out to be the final encounter between the two groups.[86]

Traditions say that Ojugbali was an old man at the time of his installation, and consequently did not reign for long. His youngest son UGBOMA IMEGWU was therefore elected to succeed him. This piece of evidence would appear to be correct, for Obi Imegwu was described by Commandant Mattei

in the early 1880's as "a young man". When Bishop Crowther came to Aboh in July 1883, Imegwu had been king for sometime. On August 7, 1881, he had himself addressed a letter to the Bishop requesting the renewal of missionary activities in Aboh. But for how long before August 1881 Imegwu was king cannot now be ascertained.

Imegwu's reign coincided with the most troubled period in the over three centuries of the Niger Valley trade. By the end of the 1870's several companies, which had attempted to revive what they could of the old middleman system of trade, had abandoned the Brass and Bonny, and moved inland. Profitable as the trade was, the presence of several small firms meant an excessive competition. The new companies had begun to evidence some interest in opening trade at Aboh, but no factory was built there before the emergence of the United African Company in November 1879.

About 1875, John Whitford, an employee of the West African Company, based at Onitsha, described Aboh as "the most important and central part of the palm-oil region". He regretted that it had not been possible to resume factory trade in Aboh owing to the addiction of the people to piracy and acts of destruction. The people longed for a factory of their own, and seemed to have resented their economic dependence on Onitsha, Ndoni, Ossomari and Oko. Since the factory system had come to stay, they would rather have one. On one occasion, an Aboh chief with a large retinue visited

Whitford, displaying the letters of recommendation (book) he had received from Europeans. According to John Whitford, the chief "offered fair promises of protection if the whitemen would land goods to barter for palm-oil". The chief was informed that their application would be considered, and Whitford himself felt that it was time enough to give Aboh another trial.[87] Anglo-French rivalry altered British complacency on the Niger, and by the end of 1880, Aboh had two factories - one by the British United African Company, the other by the Compagne francaise de l'Afrique Equatoriale.

What followed in and after 1880 must be considered in the context of the interrelation between trade and politics on the Niger. In 1879, Sir George Goldie had formed the United African Company in order to assure himself of a monopoly of trade on the Niger. He soon discovered that the presence of the French in the palm-oil belt, militated against his schemes. In the months following, Goldie came to believe that the only solution to his company's problem was a charter.

Until some new material turns up, the events of the period between 1880 and 1884 when the French and British faced each other at Aboh can only be surmised. It can be validly assumed that the Aboh merchants enjoyed the benefits of higher prices in the inevitable price war that ensued. But it would also appear that Obi Imegwu, had overstretched

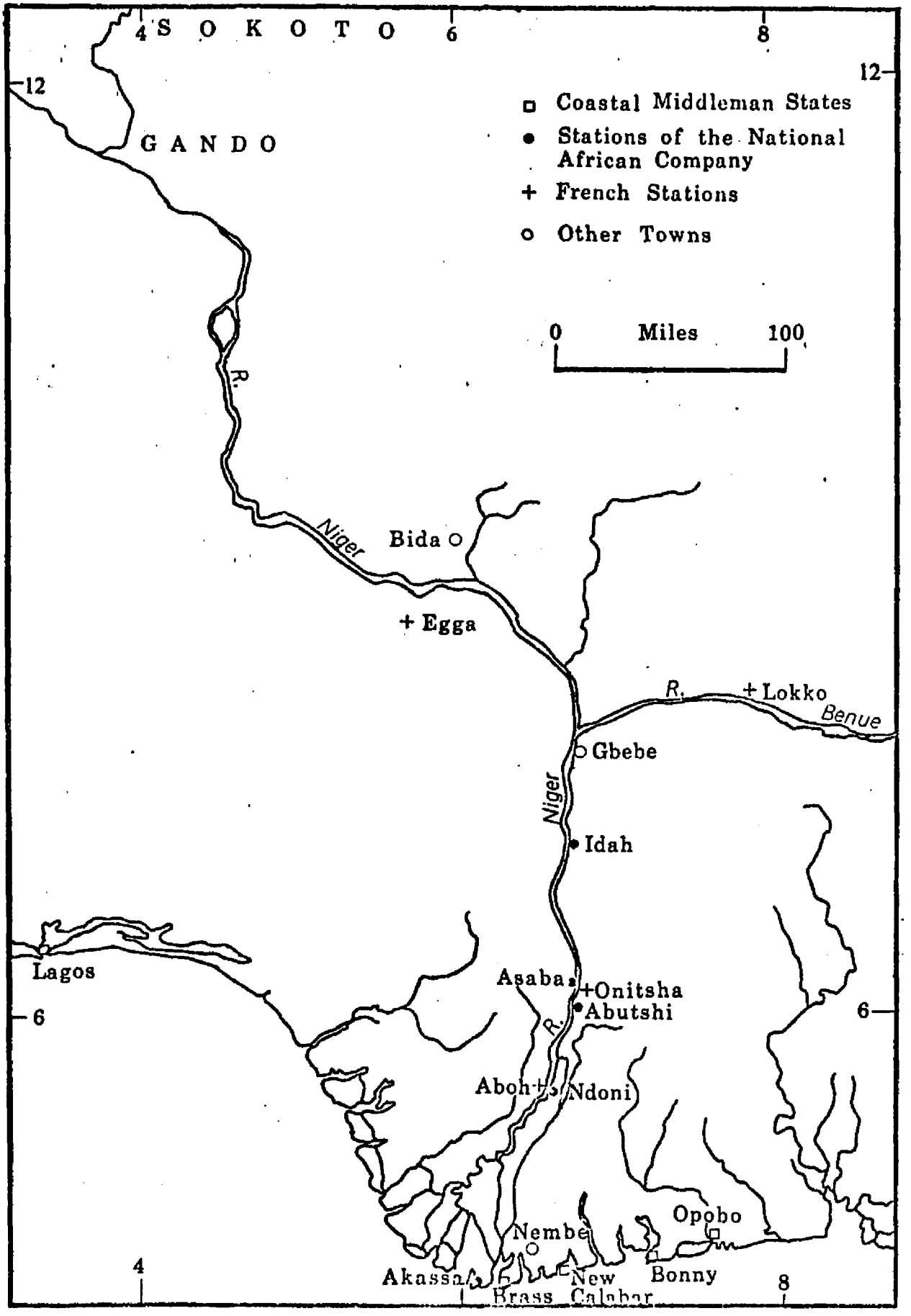


Fig. 15. European Trading Stations 1880-1884

his good fortune in his determination to revive Aboh's past prosperity. True, the British had themselves dictated a policy of free trade, and Obi Imegwu could plead that allowing the French to trade at Aboh was only giving effect to this policy. But the British had rescinded free trade in September 1863 when a new treaty was concluded with Obi Olise.

Aboh was soon in trouble with the British Royal Niger Company. Late in 1879, Onitsha was bombarded by British naval ships for an alleged pillage of the factory. Late in 1883, Aboh became involved in a duel with three British warships, for allegedly perpetrating violence on the factory. Under the command of Captain Broke, the H.M.S. Sterling, Alecto and Flirt, subjected Aboh to a systematic and devasting bombardment. The Aboh however stood firm. As soon as the vessels opened fire on the town, the people, "streamed down to the beach", to resist the invasion. The mariners succeeded in effecting a landing, and a bloody battle ensued, as the besieged Aboh withdrew into the heart of the town. The people were completely routed, and according to Geary, "several hundreds were killed and the streets .... strewn with corpses". The British on the other hand lost three sailors in addition to many injuries.[89] To this day, a number of unexploded shells from this battle are to be found scattered all over the town. The cause of the conflict is obscure. The people remember that Aboh was invaded by British warships during Obi Imegwu's reign, but no one seem

to know why this occured. However, the excuse offered by the Royal Niger Company - that acts of violence had been committed against the factory - seem an insufficient explanation of the confrontation.

According to Commandant Mattei, the French Consulaire on the Niger, Obi Imegwu was an "intensely independent" monarch.[90] He was in the habit of waging wars against his neighbours, presumably to bring vassal states under control.[91] This may have been viewed with great concern by the British Company since it upset the British pax on the Niger and directly affected trade. It would appear that the British found the independence of Imegwu, too much to cope with on a diplomatic plane. As an example of this monarch's independent character, he had a prisoner executed shortly before 1883, in front of the French factory. He had requested the agents of the Royal Niger Company and the French Company to witness the execution, but they had both declined. Obi Imegwu who would not countenance such acts of disobedience, "pronounced an individual fine of four cases of gin under the penalty of expulsion". It is not known whether or not the Royal Niger Company paid the fine, but the French Company complied with the King's orders.[92] The importance of this incidence goes beyond the mere act of executing a prisoner. That Obi Imegwu could carry out this sentence under the nose of the Europeans, and to threaten the non-payment of a unilaterally imposed fine with expulsion, indicates that the king acted

with a large measure of independence which was not always in the interest of the Royal Niger Company.

Thus, Obi Imegwu could be said to have alienated the Royal Niger Company, the moment he let the French establish trade at Aboh in flagerant contempt of the treaty of 1863. That the French paid the fine in the case cited above indicates that Obi Imegwu may have been more friendly towards them, thus threatening the interests and primacy of the Royal Niger Company in the Lower Niger. Under such circumstances, any pretext would have provided justification for the British destruction of Aboh.

Indeed, there exists some evidence that the alleged violence on the company's factory was not the sole cause of the conflict. There were, besides the companies, liberated slaves from Sierra Leone trading in Aboh. Thus, competition for produce was actually three-cornered, and the Royal Niger Company may have experienced difficulties in trading profitably. According to Geary, the trouble in Aboh was sparked off by a Sierra Leonian who was subsequently deported.[93] What he actually did to begin the conflict may never be known, but it seems likely that the trouble was sparked off by a trade dispute in which the company thought that its interests were being unduly hurt by the open door policy of Obi Imegwu.

Earlier, it was said that Sir George Goldie sought a charter for the Royal Niger Company. The main objective

was to assume political control of the entire Niger Valley. French competition which may have directly contributed to the Battle of Aboh was very much dreaded, and it was feared that if the French gained the upper hand - which seemed likely in Aboh - the use of exclusive tarriff would drive the British out of the Niger. In anticipation of the charter, the company was reconstituted under the new name of the National African Company in June 1882. Seizing advantage of the British Government's unwillingness to assume direct administration of the Niger, Goldie manoevered the National African Company into the position of an unofficial agent of the Government. The company's agents began by concluding several treaties with the chiefs of the Niger Valley which in essence conceeded complete sovereignty over their territories to the company.[94]

The company's agent for the Lower Niger, Mr. Davit McIntosh succeeded in getting Obi Imegwu to sign a prepared copy of the company's treaty on October 2, 1884. In return, the Aboh king was to be paid an annual subsidy of £32:3:2d. The treaty ceded the whole of Aboh, and the territories over which the Obi ruled to the company. The company also acquired legal title over the land in the kingdom, as well as the right to settle disputes and to exclude foreigners from the kingdom.[95] Foreigners in this context was an obvious reference to the French and Sierra Leone freed slaves. The political consequence of this treaty

was serious. Obi Imegwu had been outwitted, and now deprived of much of his traditional authority. Henceforth, Aboh was a dependency and all orders, economic and political emanated from the company's agents.

Whether Obi Imegwu realized the implications in signing away his sovereignty or whether he was pressured into doing it, may never be accurately determined. A section of the treaty pre-signed by Consul Clyde Hewett declares that the treaty was read to the king who was said to have understood its contents. It must be stressed however that ingenuis techniques were often resorted to inorder to deprive African rulers of rights over their territories during the 'scramble' for colonies. The mere act of reading out a treaty to an illiterate king was often equated with understanding. In many cases, the treaty which the king was asked to sign was different from that which was read to him.

It is therefore difficult to comprehend how the cession of "the whole of our territory" was explained to a king, the temperament of Obi Imegwu. Major Claude Macdonald who investigated these treaties in 1889 asserted that Obi Imegwu fully understood the terms of the treaty. It must however be stressed that Obi Imegwu had died when Macdonald came to Aboh. Besides, British gains on the Niger at the Berlin conference (1884) rested largely on these treaties, and Macdonald was not about to expose the fraudulent manner in

which the treaties had been obtained.[96] On the other hand, the subsidy must have induced Obi Imegwu into signing the treaty. Besides, Obi Imegwu probably expected the new arrangement to enhance his economic position.

As Professor Flint noted,

> the motive [for signing the treaties] was economic, and the chiefs looked upon the treaty as establishing a new middleman, the Niger Company who would pay better prices than the coastal Africans.[97]

Whatever Obi Imegwu's intent may have been, the treaty with the Royal Niger Company marked an important mile post in the history of the kingdom. Aboh could never be regenerated with the presence of any foreign power on the Niger. In point of fact, the methods adopted by the Company rendered the kingdom's decline inevitable. In 1889, when Macdonald visited Aboh, he reported that the king of Aboh who "at one time was a man of considerable power and influence" now ruled over only five villages.

> "Nearly all the Ibo villages in the district", Major Macdonald had written, "would allow that he is by descent their chief, but any attempt on his part to meddle with their affairs would result in a war palavar".[98]

This situation was created by the policy of balkanization pursued by the company. The National African Company set out deliberately to undermine the authority of the Obi because it rightly guessed that the existence of a powerful kingdom under an independent monarch of the character of Obi Imegwu constituted a great danger to the

company. Furthermore, the French for whom Obi Imegwu had indicated some partiality, was also hunting for treaties. The energetic French leader, Commandant Mattei was very friendly with Obi Imegwu, and the latter could have been won with considerable ease to the French side.

The National African Company therefore decided to enter into separate negotiations with the chiefs and headmen of the various villages tributary to Obi Imegwu. The company's agents carried this policy to such a ridiculous extent that the chiefs of such villages as Abalagada, that had sprung from the sectors of Aboh, were asked to sign treaties. In the end, a total of 32 treaties were concluded in the Aboh area alone between 1884 and 1885, and for these, a total subsidy of £193: 6: 2d. was agreed upon.[99]

Apart from this overt act of undercutting the authority of Obi Imegwu, the company's economic policies greatly stultified the kingdom's economy. The major purpose of the concessions had been to assure the company a monopoly of the trade of the Niger, and the company's agents rigorously enforced the clause excluding foreigners from the Niger. Merchants from Brass, Aboh's major customers under the middleman system, were classified as foreigners and barred from trading in Aboh. They could trade if they purchased expensive licenses, and paid prohibitive custom dues, but few Brassmen could afford these.

As early as 1876 the company was illegally excluding

Brass merchants from Aboh and the other Niger markets, and concentrating the trade in their hands. King Ockiah of Brass was actually constrained to address a letter to the Foreign Office, pointing out the great injustice of the company's policies.

> Many years ago, we used to make our living by selling slaves to Europeans, which was stopped by your government, and a treaty made between you and our country that we should discontinue doing so; and that we should enter into legitimate trade .... this we did and our trade gradually increased until we shipped an average of 4,500 or 5,000 tons of oil per annum.
>
> To do this, we had to open up places on the Niger, trading stations, or markets we call them, up as far as a place called Onitsha .... Some years ago the whiteman began trading in the Niger .... they did us no harm as long as they went up a long way further than we could go in their steamers, and also bought a different kind of produce .... But lately within the last six years, they have been putting up trading stations in our places .... (now) we do not send 1,500 [tons of palm-oil] per annum.
>
> It is very hard on us, in all the other rivers [a reference to the eastern Delta] the markets are secured to them, and why should a difference be made for this my river. We have no land where we can grow plantains or yam, if we cannot trade we must starve.
>
> What we want is that the markets we have made between the river and Onitsha should be left to ourselves.100

On the Niger itself, their Aboh counterparts fared no better. Trading canoes were indiscriminately seized upon by company agents and their contents confiscated. The Aboh, who were now in a different district, could not trade to Idah and the northern markets without having to purchase licenses

and pay tariffs. Very few traders could afford these licenses, and many hardly cared about them. With the Brass stopped from coming to Aboh, and the French out, manufactured goods could only be obtained from the company's factory at prices which could hardly be described as competitive.

The political and economic policies of the company had a far reaching impact on Aboh social structure. The company had earlier decreed against the use of war canoes on the Niger, and quite apart from the obvious fact that the Obi was deprived of the only effective means of dealing with recalcitrant vassals, a halt was put to the growth of house communities or trading compounds. It was earlier suggested that the trade which grew partly from Aboh's strategic location, had resulted in a reordering of Aboh social structure. One of the major elements of the new system was the absorption of aliens into the lineages in a segmentation process which greatly rested on the dynamics of trade. With this motive factor stultified, it is little wonder that the process of ikwa ogbe or the building of new wards, came to an abrupt end. The abolition of the slave trade had no doubt reduced the capacity of the Aboh merchant to accumulate slaves, since prices were driven up by scarcity. The economic decline, increased his incapacity, and actually rendered the process superfluous. In point of fact, the process had been checked in the 1860's, for the last of the

compounds were founded during the prosperous era of Obi Ossai.

We shall now turn to one other major involvement of Obi Imegwu, the desire to have the missionaries and school at Aboh. This aspect of his foreign policy was not unrelated to his determination to have a trading factory built at Aboh. He was well aware of the close connection between the missions and the companies, and felt that if he could have one, the other would follow. In 1883, evidently before the British attack, Bishop Crowther visited Aboh in response to Obi Imegwu's letter of August 1881. The monarch who was enthused by the Bishop's attention had selected a site for the mission house. His only fear was that the Bishop, as in previous occasions, "would tell him a lie".

Bishop Crowther assured Obi Imegwu that the C.M.S. was intent on fulfilling its promises, stressing that he needed funds and the peoples' cooperation. To bring out the best in Obi Imegwu, Crowther produced a document in which the king and Chiefs of Okrika "booked themselves for 30 casks of palm-oil" towards the cost of the church in their country. Obi Imegwu, looked the document through, and volunteered to meet the entire cost of the church and mission house himself.[101] Needless to say that Bishop Crowther carried away a warm impression of Imegwu.

But like the promises made earlier, this was not

fulfilled, and when next Bishop Crowther came to Aboh, Obi Imegwu was dead. The exact date of Obi Imegwu's death is not known, but it may have occurred in 1885. When Crowther and Archdeacon Johnson reached Aboh in September 1886, they were informed that "King Boma", i.e. Obi Ugboma Imegwu was dead.[102] As no king had been elected on the occasion of this visit (although none could have been elected that early) it is safe to assume that Imegwu had not died for long.

The "leading Chief" after Obi Ugboma Imegwu was Nwadei Opia Aje, (d. 1911) a son of the late Aje of the Aboh factory fame. He too reaffirmed the desire of the Aboh to have the missionaries at Aboh. The C.M.S. was also getting very concerned over the question of the Aboh mission. A meeting of the Niger Finance Committee met in March 1887 and selected a Sierra Leone volunteer Mr. Allen to head the new station. He would be assisted by a Mr. Akpom who was to act in the capacity of a school teacher.[103] But by May, the house was not ready. As a temporary measure, Mr. McIntosh of the National African Company granted the company's spare building to the C.M.S., but the offer was turned down. The cost of maintaining the buildings, argued the Finance Committee, would be prohibitive. Further more, the mission would be left dry whenever the company decided to re-occupy its buildings.[104]

In the end, the decision was taken, to build a temporary structure. Towards this end, a sum of £100 was set aside. In the meantime, Mr. Allen, described as a "practical man", and ideal for the new station at Aboh had arrived and was temporarily posted to Alenso. But the absence of an Obi removed any effective and powerful voice. The chiefs chose the occasion to quarrel over the location of the mission, Chief Opia Aje had directed that the mission be built on a piece of land belonging to another chief without first obtaining his approval. Although the site was more centrally located, the owner refused to allow the mission occupy it. The chiefs after a meeting in December 1887 informed Archdeacon Johnson that the site in reference was "the abode of old witches, whose medicines were buried there", and that could therefore not take the responsibility to clear it. Johnson was invited to choose another site by two of the chiefs, but he rejected the idea, and succeeded in reaching a settlement with the chief whose land had earlier been donated.[105]

Actual construction began in January 1889, and the agent Mr. Allen took up residence about the month of May 1899. In 1890, Mr. Eden, the Secretary of the C.M.S. headquarters at Onitsha visited Aboh and commented favourably on the work of Messrs. Allen and Akpom. The mission had barely started and consequently, there was little to report. Mr. Eden

however observed that there was

> a spirit of genuine enquiry among the people, they are willing for their children to come to school, and they themselves come to the services which are held on sundays in small numbers ....[106]

Attendance at school was however small and irregular. Messrs. Allen and Akpom resorted to the technique of going out into the streets, alphabet sheets in hand, gathering people to learn the A B C. The buildings themselves were inadequate. Church services were held in the small verandah of the mission house, only a few feet wide, and Mr. Eden therefore recommended a more spacious and permanent accommodation. Eden thought that Aboh held out much promise, but unfortunately, the only annual report for 1889 filed by Mr. Allen is missing from the records of the C.M.S.[107]

But the great hope held out to the Aboh suddenly faded away towards the end of 1890. Onitsha needed more hands, and consequently, Messrs. Allen and Akpom were withdrawn from Aboh. The closing of the Aboh station was conceived as a "temporary" measure, but it was never re-opened until the middle of the following century.

III

Enough has been said of the conditions created by the policies of the National African Company to show that their impact on Aboh was primarily negative. It is perhaps no

small coincidence that the Aboh people chose no new Obi all through the period of the Company's administration of what it delimited as the Aboh District of its far flung Niger territories. The district extended from the Ijo town of Patani northwards to Ndoni and included the entire Oguta country east of the Niger. Described in 1890 as a district of "considerable importance", it had six trading factories, - Aboh, Okpai, Umunankwo, Utchi, Oguta, and Krigeni. The last two were located on the Orashi River east of the River Niger.[108]

Supreme authority in the District was held by an official with the title of District Agent. He combined in his person the executive, judicial and constabulary powers, and was the company's chief trading agent. His primary duty in the economic sphere was the enforcement of the company's oppressive commercial regulations. The District Agent's court was one of first instance and heard all cases except those involving foreigners or sums over £50. Both categories of cases were referred to the company's senior judicial officers at the Niger Territories capital of Asaba.

One of the most damaging consequences of the new set up was that the chiefs and elders of the Niger Valley communities were deprived of their judicial authority. Worse however, was the abusive use which the company agents made of their paramilitary powers. Professor Joseph Anene has daubed this system which concentrated so much power in the

hands of an individual the most arbitrary and oppresive economic and political structure yet devised.[109] The inquiries of Major Claude Macdonald corroborates this assessment of the company's administration. He found that the agents were rarely experienced and were in the habit of misusing the wide powers they exercised over the lives of Africans. Murder and the indiscriminate burning of towns by the constabulary, usually at the behest of the District agent, was a common occurrence.[110] Influenced by the scathing reports of Macdonald, the British Government revoked the Company's charter in 1899, fourteen years after it had assumed the power to administer the Niger Valley.

In 1907, seven years after the British Government officially assumed control of the Niger, the people of Aboh settled down to piece together their broken past. Dr. Ikenna Nzimiro talks of an eight year interregnum between Obi Imegwu and his successor, i.e. 1897 to 1905.[111] But this is not borne out by the facts at our disposal. The accounts of Commandant Mattei, and the C.M.S. show that Obi Imegwu reigned between 1880 and 1886. Since no Obi is known to have reigned between Imegwu and Ossai Enete II, it is obvious that the interregnum extended over 22 years, and not eight.

In 1844 when Obi Ossai I died, the Aboh went through a period of sixteen years during which time there was no effective central authority. The events of this period were

seen to have been of dire consequences for the kingdom. A second extended interregnum, at a time when the company's policies were slowly but steadily undercutting the economic and political base of Aboh had even more devastating effects.

For example, the company's delimination of the Aboh District was artificial, and intended primarily for its administrative and commercial convenience of the company. As had been noted, attempts by the Aboh to enforce discipline within its territories was discouraged. In point of fact, Obi Oputa, who was very closely associated with the National African Company, informed later British Colonial Administrators that attempts by his predecessors to enforce such disciplines were severely punished by the company.[112]

During the interregnum, the Aboh palm-oil markets in the Ukwuani country which had in the past traded through the Ase to Aboh, were successfully broken into by the Itsekiri. Chief Nana, the great Itsekiri middleman, later appointed "Governor of the Benin River", had succeeded in establishing an execlusive control over the trade of the Ethiope River as far as Obiaruku, and extending beyond into the Ukwuani palm-oil country.[113] Nana's removal from his base at Brohemie in 1894 merely changed the actors, for several other Itsekiri middlemen quickly established themselves in Chief Nana's markets. By 1906, the District Officers were saying that the active Itsekiri had established "numerous markets in the Kwale District" which is very rich in palm-oil.[114]

The election of Ossai Enete as Obi in 1907 coincided with British reorganization of the administrative structure of its territories. In 1906, a total of 14 Administrative Districts were carved out of the four Provinces of the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. One of these was the Aboh District with headquarters at Isala-Aboh, a more elevated village on the left bank of the Niger directly opposite Aboh. Some informants, who knew Ossai Enete, say that the new king was chosen without any opposition, and some would go so far to say that he was prevailed upon to accept the crown. But the new king did not live long.

Although Ossai Enete belonged to the Umuozegbe sector, and descended from Obi Ugboma, he was not raised in Aboh. He had lived in Oko during the era of company rule, and later moved to the Odekpe country to which his mother belonged. After his election, he put up a temporary palace at Osubom (beach), opposite the Umuojugbali sector while awaiting the reconstruction of the official palace. The palace had not been occupied since the death of Obi Imegwu, and had fallen into disuse. Three years after he was elected, Obi Ossai II died in his Osubom residence, and has gone down in the traditions as Obi Osubom i.e. "sand beach king".

Interestingly, Ossai Enete had not undergone the major rituals of kingship. For example, he had not been carried on the shoulders through the town-ibu eze - and had not been

crowned. However he had been ritually anointed by the Oduah, and this rite of ido nzu was the most important of all the kingship rituals. The Aboh waived tradition and decided to perform the other rituals posthumously, in order to remove any doubts as to Ossai Enete's place in the pantheon of ancestral Obi.[115]

His brother Obi Okwuenu was said to have been requested to fill the throne, but his mother prevailed upon him to reject the offer, and actually abducted him to Onitsha. The throne remained vacant for another six years until February 1916 when Obi Oputa, grandson of Obi Olise, was crowned.[116]

NOTES

[1]F.O. 84/663, John Beecroft to Col. Nicolls, Jan. 18, 1846.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Hutchinson, op. cit., p.41.

[5]This date has been reached from various estimates of Aje's age, notably that by Laird. In 1832, he had reported that Aje was a lad of 16 years old.

[6]Baikie, op. cit., p. 304.

[7]Allen and Thomson, op. cit., 1, p. 204.

[8]Baikie, op. cit., pp. 42-3.

[9]Hutchinson, op. cit., p. 174

[10]Aboh, interview tith Nos. 1, 4, and 11 in Appendix A March-April, 1970.

[11]Crowther, Journal of an Expedition, pp. 16-17.

[12]Baikie, op. cit., pp. 42-3.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Obi, op. cit., pp. 65-6.

[15]Crowther and Taylor, Gospel on the Banks of the Niger, p. 17.

[16]Cole, op. cit., pp. 141-2.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Obi, op. cit., p. 66. This writer was shown the site of Obi Olise's palace.

[19]The most detailed account of the career of King Jaja of Opobo will be found in Dike, op. cit., pp. 182-202.

[20]Crowther and Taylor, Gospel on the Banks of the Niger, p. 19.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Baikie, op. cit., p. 50.

[23]Ibid., p. 300.

[24]This opinion was also expressed by Dr. Fred Omu, in an unpublished paper, "The Rise and Fall of a Riverain Power, Aboh to 1900", read at the 15th Annual Congress of the Historical Society of Nigeria.

[25]The objectives of this expedition were two fold. Firstly, it was to try to effect a junction with Dr. Heinrich Barth who had left England for Central Africa at the end of 1849. He was thought to be in the vicinity of the River Benue, but all attempts to contact him proved abortive. Second, the expedition was to explore the Benue. Beecroft was to have led the expedition, but he died before the vessels reached Fernando Po, and Baikie took over command. F.O. 2/18, objects of the 1854 Expedition - admirality to John Beecroft, leader of the Expedition, May, 19, 1854. See also, Baikie, op. cit., Appendix A, pp. 400-405.

[26]Crowther, Journal of An Expedition, p. 19.

[27]F.O. 2/23, No. 15, Baikie to Earl of Clarendon, Sept., 28, 1857.

[28]Crowther, Journal of An Expedition, p. 186.

[29]Ibid., p. 191.

[30]F.O. 2/23, Baikie to Clarendon, Sept. 28, 1856. See also Crowther and Taylor, Gospel on the Banks of the Niger, p. 38.

[31]Baikie, op. cit., pp. 317-8.

[32]Ibid., p. 317.

[33]Flint, op. cit., p. 20.

[34]F.O. 2/27 Macgregor Laird to Grant, May 6, 1857.

[35]Crowther and Taylor, Gospel on the Banks of the Niger, p. 16.

[36]Ibid., p. 39.

[37]Ibid., p. 17.

[38]F.O. 97/434, Appendix 1 in Memorial to Viscount Palmerston, Mar. 15, 1860.

[39]Cole, op. cit., p. 205.

[40]Ibid., pp. 18-20.

[41]Ibid., p. 46.

[42]Parl Paper, 1862, LXI, "Reports from Naval Officer", p. 123 (of the report).

[43]F.O.2/34, No. 3, Baikie to Russel, Feb. 29, 1860.

[44]Dike, op. cit., pp. 166-174.

[45]Cole, op. cit., p. 197.

[46]F.O. 2/34, No. 3. Baikie to Russel, Feb. 29. 1860.

[47]Cole, op. cit., p. 197.

[48]F.O. 2/34, Glover to Russel, Jan. 13, 1860. See also Hutchinson, Ten Years of Wandering among the Ethiopians (London, 1861), pp. 154-5.

[49]F.O. 97/433, Baikie to Russel, Jan. 13, 1861.

[50]F.O. 97/434. Memorial to Viscount Palmerston, Mar. 15, 1860.

[51]Crowther and Taylor, Gospel on the Banks of the Niger, p. 40.

[52]Cole, op. cit., p. 36.

[53]Ibid., p. 42.

[54]Parl Paper, 1862, LXI, "Reports from Naval Officers", p. 123 (of the report).

[55]Ibid., See also F.O. 2/34, Baikie to Russel, Oct. 11, 1860.

[56]F.O. 97/433, Commander Douglas to Commodore Edmonstone, Sept. 26, 1860.

[57]F.O. 2/34. Report of Lt. Glover on Niger Trade for the Years 1857 and 1858, Feb. 28, 1860.

[58]Cole, op. cit., p. 152.

[59]Ibid., p. 207.

[60]Ibid.

[61]F.O. 2/34. Russel to Admiral Dunds, Sept. 24, 1860.

[62]F.O. 2/34. Enc. in Admiralty letter of September, 3 1860; H.M.S. Arrogant, Edmonstone to Dundas, July 13, 1860. "To attempt to drive a legal trade with people, hundreds of miles in the interior", wrote Edmonstone, "and having to pass through hostile tribes who require to be coerced .... was impracticable. The natives of the Delta of the Niger are some of the most warlike, treacherous, and cruel in Africa. The banks of the River a precipitous, affording sure shelter for their guns .... while our people could not touch them even by rockets. I do trust and hope therefore that if these arrangements with Laird are not irrevocably settled, that we should pause before committing ourselves to what seems at present a most hazardous and fruitless expedition".

[63]F.O. 2.34. Laird to Russel, Nov. 16, 1860.

[64]F.O. 97/433, Baikie to Lord John Russel, Jan. 2, 1861.

[65]Parl, Paper, 1862, Vol. LXI. "Reports of Naval Officers", p. 124 (of the report).

[66]F.O. 97/433, Commander Douglas to Commodore Edmonstone, Oct. 2, 1861.

[67]Parl. Paper, 1862, Vol. LXI. "Reports from Naval Officers"., p. 108 (of the report).

[68]Ibid.

[69]Ibid., p. 117.

[70]Ibid., p. 121.

[71]F.O. 97/433, Commander Douglas to Commodore Edmonstone, Oct. 2, 1861.

[72]Parl. Paper, 1862, Vol. LXI. "Reports from Naval Officers", p. 121, (of the report).

[73]For the history of the establishment of the Niger mission of Onitsha, See J. F. Ajayi, Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891 (London, 1965).

[74]Crowther and Taylor, Gospel on the Banks of the Niger, p. 19.

[75]Ibid., p. 38.

[76]Ibid., p. 349.

[77]Ajayi, op. cit., p. 210.

[78]F.O. 97/434. The Company of African Merchants to Earl Russel, August 24, 1863.

[79]F.O. 97/434. Liverpool merchants to Earl Russel, May 3, 1864; Merchants of the city of Bristol to Earl Russel, May 6, 1864; Anglo-African Company to Earl Russel, May 12, 1864.

[80]Ajayi, op. cit., pp. 211-2.

[81]C.M.S. A3/04 Crowther to Hutchinson, Oct. 16, 1879, cited in Flint, op. cit., p. 26.

[82]Great Britain, Foreign Office, British and Foreign State Papers, 1863, Vol. 59. "Treaties", pp. 1187-8.

[83]Crowther to Parents Committee, April 5, 1883; C.M.S. GA3/03.

[84]Aboh, Interview with No. 20, in Appendix A, Aboh, Mar. 1970.

[85]Many of my informants, Udogwu Olise Imegwu, Chief Essumei Okeyea, Chief Enebeli, and Prince Ogwu Imegwu testified to seeing these canoes.

[86]The treaty was intended to be perpetually binding and eternally witnessed. Both sides produced a person each who were buried alive close together. Two silk cotton trees were then transplanted on the spot where they stand to this day. My elderly informants still know the trees which the country around refer to as Akpu Anam.

[87]John Whitford, Trading Life in Western and Central Africa (2nd ed. London, 1967), p. 158.

[88]Flint, op. cit., pp. 1-61.

[89]Sir W. Geary, Nigeria under British Rule (London, 1915), p. 175.

[90]Commandant Mattei, "Rapports sur le Niger et le Benue", Archives des Missions Scientifique et Literat. es, 3rd series, Vol. X, Paris, 1883, pp. 429-430.

[91]Ibid.

[92]Ibid.

[93]Geary, op. cit., p. 175.

[94]Flint, op. cit., pp. 34-91.

[95]See Appendix E. for a copy of the 1863 treaty.

[96]Flint, op. cit., p. 137. Also J. Anene, Southern Nigeria in Transition, London, 1966, p. 128.

[97]Flint op. cit., pp. 137-8.

[98]F.O. 84/2109 "Report on the Administration of the Niger Territories", by Major Macdonald. Jan. 9, 1890.

[99]Ibid.

[100]Ockiah and other Chiefs of Brass to F.O. July y, 1876, forwarded in F.O. 84/1498, Admirality to F.O. Dec. 13, 1876, quoted in Flint, op. cit., p. 28. See also Alagoa, op. cit., pp. 60-1.

[101]Crowther to Parents Committee, April 5, 1885, C.M.S. GA3/03.

[102]Crowther's report to Parents Committee, Oct. 13, 1886, C.M.S. GA3/03.

[103]Minutes of Finance Committee, March 1887, C.M.S. GA3/03.

[104]Minutes of Finance Committee, May 8, 1887, C.M.S. GA3/03.

[105]Archdeacon Johnson to Crowther, Jan. 13, 1888, C.M.S. GA3/03.

[106]Ibid.

[107]F. N. Eden to Lang, July 9, C.M.S. GA3/03.

[108]F.O. 84/2109, "Report on the Administration of the Niger Territories", by Major Macdonald, Jan. 9, 1890.

[109]Anene, op. cit., p. 128.

[110]F.O. 84/2109, "Report on the Administration of the Niger Territories", by Major Macdonald, Jan. 9, 1890.

[111]Nzimiro, op. cit., p. 194.

[112]Kwale District, 4/8. File K. 167/1929.

[113]The most recent and most detailed account of Chief Nana's career is Obaro Ikime's Merchant Prince of the Niger Delta (London, 1968), see especially, pp. 1-96.

[114]F.O. 592/3, Annual Report for Southern Nigeria, 1906-7.

[115]Aboh, Interview with Nos. 4 and 6, in Appendix A, March, 1970.

[116]Obi Oputa (1916-1964) was reputed to be the oldest man in Aboh at the time of his death in 1964. His age was generally assessed at 120 years, but from rough calculations based on the age of his eldest children, Obi Oputa Alumona was born no earlier than 1865-1870. It is unfortunate that this writer was not opportuned to meet Obi Oputa. He was a young lad during the British attack of Aboh in 1883, and is known by many to have memories of the incident. It is perhaps no coincident that most of the unexploded shells of this battle have been collected in his palace.

Almost nothing is known of his early childhood. At about 18 years, Oputa Alumona left his father's house to live with a senior official of the Royal Niger Company, Mr. Joseph Flint. They settled first at Obosi, and later travelled widely throughout the Niger Valley. He had no formal education (there were no schools then) but Oputa acquired some smattering knowledge of English language through his rare opportunity of association with Europeans.

When he left Mr. Flint is not known, but it may have been in 1899 when the company's charter was rescinded. Oputa returned to Aboh, and soon established as a palm-oil and ivory merchant. This involved him in extensive trips, and is said to have travelled as far east as the Cameroons to purchase ivory. By 1916 when he was elected Obi of Aboh, Oputa had grown to become one of the richest men in the kingdom.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

Oputa's reign coincided with an auspicious era in the kingdom's history. From the very low ebb into which Aboh had fallen, the Obi's authority was revived under the stimulus of the indirect rule system of local government in the 1920s. British administrative officers, notably Mr. G. B. Williams and Captain E. A. Miller believed firmly that the Obi's power had been considerable in the past. The recommendations they submitted to the Government resulted in the elevation of Obi Oputa to the exalted position of Sole Native Administrator for a good part of the present Aboh Division. For a period, there was considerable calm. The Obi presided over the Court of Appeal, and was the instrument through which tax was collected. But the calm was more apparent than real. The reconstituted "Aboh Kingdom", if one might use the term, proved only ephemeral. In essence, many of the communities believed to have been under the influence of the Obi of Aboh rejected the idea and one by one they were removed from Oputa's jurisdiction. Within twenty five years of the reorganization, the monarch withdrew completely from public life, and must have gone to his grave a sad and highly disappointed man.

There is little doubt that the pint-sized monarch lacked the charisma for the position fate thrust upon him. Some district officers found him to be incapable and lacking the prestige of the office, but others thought that Obi Oputa was a great asset to the local administration. That he lost his 'empire' is perhaps not of his own making. The early decades of the twentieth century began a great social and political change. The concept of "local self-government" which formed the basis of the reforms was inherently inimical to the growth of a centralized authority. Politically therefore, the entire program was a mass of contradiction. It is no surprise then that almost everywhere in Nigeria, with the exception of the Emirates of the Moslem north, local government reforms led to a gradual dimunition in the powers of the chiefs and traditional rulers. In the Yoruba country the paramountcy of many of the traditional Oba was challenged by groups who denied that their villages were ever under the jurisdiction of particular kings. As local self-government advanced, even chiefs whose powers were initially unchallenged were gradually edged from a position of paramountcy to purely ceremonial positions by the new educated and elected representatives.

The demise of the prestige and power of Obi Oputa probably came about too soon but given the atmosphere of social

change and the democratization of the organs of local government, it was perhaps inevitable.

The two and one half centuries of Aboh history covered in this study (1650-1900) was a period of challenge, and adaptability. From a small riverain community Aboh became one of the major centres of trade behind the Gulf of Guinea.

The history of Aboh underlies the fundamental importance of trade in the evolution of African societies. The fundamental importance of trade as a vessel for culture change, especially in the evolution of powerful state systems has been demonstrated in medieval Western Sudan where the gold and salt trade across the Sahara helped in the formation of such powerful empires as Ghana, Mali and Songhai. In central and eastern Africa, the growth of Kazembe, and the Luba-Lunda Kingdoms was essentially due to the development in this region of long distance trade. It also illustrates the relative ease with which traditional societies adapt to changes. Although trade in foodstuff and other local manufactured goods with neighbouring communities was not unimportant, the slave and palm-oil export trade would seem to have made the crucial difference in the social and political history of Aboh.

One of the greatest assets of Aboh was her strategic location at the apex of the Niger Delta, and the relative ease of communication with the coastal city states and the

great commercial cities of the confluence. But if geography made the city well suited for the role of entrepot, Aboh values and flexible social system provided the greatest impetus to the expansion of the state. The need to exploit the commercial resources of the surrounding country, and to make the most of the overseas trade led to changes in the kinship and social structure. The Aboh response was a gradual de-emphasizing of the patrilineally descended kinship group. They acquired slaves and other dependents who were absorbed into the new and larger lineage. The objective was to provide the new entrepreneurs with additional manpower for the maximum exploitation of the Niger Valley trade. In time, the preponderance of trade in Aboh catapulted the new business centred 'lineages' into the major social components of the city.

A major political implication of the new social and economic order was the gradual up-building of the authority of the king whose influence seemed, initially, to have been restricted to purely religious matters. A concomitant of this development was an outward growth of the Obi's authority. By the end of the first half of the nineteenth century, the influence of the Obi of Aboh had extended over a considerable stretch of the Niger Valley and the immediate neighbourhood. Such a situation came about because trade in Aboh was a royal monopoly. The easy access which Aboh

kings had to firearms and luxury goods played an important role in this process.

Decline set in during the course of the second half of the nineteenth century because Aboh's role of middleman in the Niger Valley was assailed by Europeans who had penetrated the Niger in the 1830s. It was thought that the communities on the Niger wished for nothing more than direct trade with Europeans who hitherto had restricted their activities to the coast. One Aboh king did welcome the change, but both he and commentators seem not to have understood the nature of Aboh's middleman role. A proliferation of trade depots on the Niger Valley, and especially in areas from where Aboh merchants obtained commodities was certainly not in the best interest of the city's economy and political authority.

The new stimulus drew a ready response. Led by Kwadei Aje, the Aboh tried unsuccessfully to drive the British out of the Niger. The prize at stake was profitable commerce, but such opposition to the penetration of the interior as Aje had led, has been variously interpreted in political terms as early manifestations of African nationalism. Thus, the case of Chief Aje of Aboh provides some parallel to the career of Chief Nana of the Itsekiri and King Jaja of Opobo. Prince Aje like Chief Nana, and King Jaja were engaged in a struggle to protect their economic preserves, and to

maintain the spirit of their national integrity. Aboh reaction to European control was thus not a passive one. The history of this period indicates that the people were alive to their interests, and they took steps to protect these even where some of their actions were bound to infuriate the Europeans.

The Chiefs of Aboh, like Chief Nana and King Jaja, failed to contain British might and imperial drive, and before the century was out, British power was very strongly entrenched in the entire country. The destruction of Aboh's economic power on the Niger had far reaching social and political implications. The sharp constriction of its possibilities and scope by the monopolistic policies of the National African Company in the 1870s greatly undermined the central base of the authority of Aboh kings, and resulted in the dimunition of their influence on the Niger. Socially, it arrested the process of lineage expansion through the incorporation of aliens. Militarily, the decline of the war-canoe system reduced from the ability of the Obi to maintain the territoral integrity of the kingdom.

APPENDIX A

LIST OF INFORMANTS

Casual information obtained from many Aboh people is not listed by informants. Dates at which interviews were held appear in footnote.

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(1) Mr. Anthony O. Nwachukwu
Ashaka, via Kwale.
Age: 55 years.
Son of late Chief Nwachukwu Okpo Aje, Onodi of Aboh. (d. 1956).
Mr. Nwachukwu was headmaster of the Local Administration School Aboh in the 1940s. He collected traditions at the time and taught the pupils of the L. A. School elements of Aboh history.
Interview at Ashaka, January 1970, Taped and written.

(2) Madam Agwe Opia Aje.
Ogbe Aje, Onuobikwu Aboh.
Age: c. 85 years (born shortly after death of Obi Imegwu).

Grand-daughter of Aje, about whom much has been written in the main body of this work, See especially Chapter Seven.

Taped and written, March, 1970.

(3) Chief Chukwumah Olise, Akpanuka of Aboh.

Ogbe Akpanuka,

Aboh.

Age: c. 85.

A high ranking member of the First College of title holders and intimately tied with the Obi and palace rituals.

Interview March, 1970; Taped and written.

(4) Chief Ijomah Essumei Ugbomah, Ndanike of Aboh

Aboh.

Age: 61.

Chief Ijomah Essumei holds one of the most coverted Aboh titles, and is among the highest ranked in the First College. His knowledge of local history is generally conceded by everyone including his older colleagues.

Interview, March 1970, Taped and written.

(5) Chief Essumei Okeye, Omodi of Aboh

Aboh.

Age: c. 70.

Interview March 1970; Taped and written.

(6) Mr. M. O. Chukwuma,
Ashaka, Via Kwale
Age: c. 78.
A member of the Igbu title society, he was born and raised in Aboh and learnt the traditions from elders.

(7) Chief R. B. Ugbomah, The Ochiagha of Aboh.
Onuobikwu, Aboh.
Age: 56 years.
Chief Ugboma is the great grandson of Aje, a member of the second College of Aboh titled men, and "leader of war."
Interview: One held at Lagos in December 1969 where chief Ugboma was then staying during the heat of the civil war, and others at Ashaka, March 1970.
Taped and written.

(8) Chief Opia Ijoma, Ozea of Aboh,
Aboh
Age: 63
Another high ranking Aboh title holder. His social position apart, Chief Ijoma's knowledge of Aboh traditions is very highly respected, and readily recommended by all. His version of the migration from Benin was considered to be most elaborate and most representative of the traditions collected.
Taped and written.

(9) Chief Ossai Okechukwu, Otono of Aboh.
Ogbogwu, Umuojugbali,
Aboh.
Age: 54.
A traditional chief of the palace administration.
Interview recorded and written. March, 1970.

(10) Ogwu Imegwu.
Ogbuku, Aboh.
Age: 36.
Ogwu Imegwu is grandson of Obi Imegwu and currently involved in the tussle for the vacant throne. At the time of the interview with the prince, he was elected Uwa oma, i.e. obi elect, but the Mid-western Nigerian Government has sence instituted a commission of Inquiry into the dispute, the result of which is still awaited.
Interview: March, 1970, Taped and written.

(11) Mr. Amoluni Akalamu.
Abalagada Village
Aboh
Age: 33.
Amoluni is the son of the late Chief Ugboma Onyenekunum, Akalamu of Aboh. He was versed in the traditions, but he died before this writer was opportuned to reach Aboh. Amoluni is said to have

associated much with the late Chief, and the writer was impressed by the young man's power of oratory which he certainly acquired from his late father.

Interview at Abalagada. Taped, March, 1970.

(12) Chief J. I. N. Oliseh, Ogbuefi (bull killer)
Ashaka. Via Kwale.
Age: 50 years.
At the time of the interview, Chief Oliseh, whose father was then Okpala ukwu of Ashaka, was acting in the capacity of Okpala ukwu as his father was then too old, and could neither see nor hear.
Born and raised in Ashaka, Chief J. Olisch learnt the traditions from his grandfather.

(13) Chief Enwefa Akpati
Ndoni.
Age: c. 83.
Interview at Ndoni, written April, 1970.

(14) Udogwu Olise Imegwu.
Isala, Village,
Aboh.
Age: 73.
Udogwu Olise is grandson of Obi Imegwu. One of those who testified to have seen and used the two canoes which the Aboh captured from the Anam during the

Ajie Enebeli is one of the Sector leaders of Ogbuku, and direct descendant of Ugboma Ozegbe Ogwezi.

Interview: March, 1970, taped and written.

(19) Mr. Obiosa Ugboma
Ogbe Aje,
Aboh.
Age: c. 43.
Descended in direct line from Obi Ossai through Aje.
Interview March, 1970, taped and written.

(20) Okei Aje,
Ogbuku,
Aboh.
Age: c. 85
There were times when I resorted to group testimony, particularly at Ogbuku. Everyone agreed that Okei Aje was best informed and left most of the narration of the traditions to him.
Interview March-April, 1970. Taped.

(21) Mr. Isaac Ijoma,
88, Ibidun Street,
Lagos.
Age: 37.
Mr. Ijoma went to school at Aboh and was taught the traditions at school. He also acquired much of

Aboh-Anam war in Obi Ojugbali's reign.

Interview at Isala. Taped, April 1970.

(15) Chief Enebeli, Ubo of Aboh

Isala Village,

Aboh.

Age: 81.

Interview, written, April 1970.

(16) Mr. Ossai Ndupu.

Ogbuku,

Aboh.

Age: c. 85.

Ossai Ndupu is grandson of Obi Ojugbuli.

Interview March, 1970. Taped.

(17) Mrs. Ojuzor Ugbomah,

38, Iletunmi Street,

Lagos.

Age: c. 80.

Mrs. Ugbomah is the wife of the late Chief Ugbomah Opiah Aje. She was living in Aboh until the current civil wars.

Interview December, 1969. Taped.

(18) Mr. Ajie Enebeli

Ogbuku.

Aboh.

Age: c. 82 years.

what he tells from his grandmother.

Interview December 1969. Taped.

(22) Mr. Albert Nwachukwu,

Ashaka, Via Kwale

Age: 40.

Interview: December, 1969. Taped.

(23) Mr. Adolphus Nwachukwu,

88, Ibidun Street,

Lagos.

Age: 27.

Grandson of the late Chief Nwachukwu Okpo, Onodi of Aboh.

(24) Mr. Obi Akpati

Okpai

Age: 58.

Interview: April 1970. Taped. (minor)

(25) Mr. A. S. Oputa,

Warri.

Age: 37

Mr. Oputa comes from Afor, but his mother is of the Akarai group.

APPENDIX B

OBI OPUTA'S VERSION OF THE ABOH TRADITION RECORDED SOMETIME BEFORE 1948.

1. The big Aboh town come from Benin city.
2. The Benin City people were very powerful, for this reason a great multitude departed from the city aiming to rule the whole world.
3. As they travelled, some of them made their settlement in some lands they encountered by their way.
4. A certain man called Oputa Uku stopped at Uzoro with his own people, by the king's consent.
5. The others journeyed till they came to Obe-Etim, where another man named Etim Uku dwelt with his own people.
6. The other, Osumili-Uku by name continued travelling till he reached Osisa, where he branched and settled with his own people.
7. Another, Ozoma-Uku by name, took his own people down to Ashakaand settled there.
8. The Aboh king journeyed with his people up to a bank of a certain creek, where they had no chance to cross over. Standing there the king saw Ewelie people, who knew how to pull canoe, so he begged them to cross

him and his people overside, of which they agreed. The king started to send his people into the canoe for them to cross, but contrary to this , the people pulled to the corner of the creek and capsized the king's people to death by a word Igbamioko. The people repeated this cruel deed for several times. The king, trying to experience the mystery at this, sent into the canoe a man with a horn, which the king ordered him to blow when crossed overside. The people did the same thing, of which the king waited and heard nothing.

9. He again sent into the canoe very powerful warriors Izomo, Iyesele, and Odogu with their swords. Through this they were safely crossed to the land, in which they saw no one, and they entered the canoe, and crossed again to tell the king what had happened. So the king with those who remained with him were helpless. Thinking what they would do, a certain man took a pole to measure the depth of the creek.
10. Then he found that the creek was shallow, so they started to wade across the creek. After they all had gone on land, they saw a number of manatees emerging from the very line they waded across.
11. They thought formerly that they walked on the bed of the creek, not knowing that they walked on top of the manatees, which merely formed a bridge-like

line for them to pass over. The king having seen the kindness the animals showed to them more than human creature, passed a decree to all his people that no one should neither kill nor eat manatees, and if anyone were guilty of this law, would be severely punished. This forbidden of manatees is hitherto reigning in Aboh.

12. Before they started from the place where they crossed the creek, one powerful warrior Izomo, asked the king's permission that they would fight the towns they came in contact with, as a revenge for what their people had done to them, by drowning their mates.

13. The king yielded to his proposition. They started on till they came to Ugbene. When the people first saw Igabo, they picked him up as a slave. But when the king arrived and saw the people dragging with his warrior Igabo, they at once fought the town and drove them away. They journeyed on, till they came to a certain place where the king left some people to build there, and he called the place Amai.

14. He warned the people to keep watch for any report that might arise from those places they left behind.

15. They travelled on till they came to Aboh, where they met Akarai people living and they themselves

dwelt on one part.

16. After some time the king suggested a way to drive the Akarai people from the land.

17. The king then summoned for a meeting inviting the Akarai people to attend. Before the meeting was held, the king made an arrangement with his people to war the Akarai people when they were fully come.

18. When the Akarai people had all come, the king signalled to his people, and they started firing the Akarai people till they fled away. Some of the Akarai people ran to Akarai-Atani, and others to Akarai-Ogidi. After some periods the Akarai people returned and pleaded for peace, and the king agreed.

19. So he led them to Akarai-Eti and some to Akarai Utere to make their dwellings. The people thereby agreed to serve the king with whatever big animal they might kill, such as elephant, bull, hippopotamus, and so on. Even the surrounding towns made the same promise, in order that they might not be driven away by the king.

20. Some of the Benin people went and settled at Ase, some at Onitsha Miri, some at Onitsha-Ugbo, some at Onitsha-Olonah, some at Okpai and others in some other places.

21. The Aboh king settled at Aboh and the Benin king

empowered him to rule up to Onoku down, and to the boundary called Imo.

22. During the ancient time, before ordaining a king, a person was to be killed, but this time a cow will be killed instead of man.

23. The first king who led the Aboh people from Benin City was called Ogwezi. This Obi-Ogwezi born a second king called Ezonuwe, from whom the present king's family descended.

24. The sword brought by the first king Obi Ogwezi is still in the house of the present king.

Source: John W. Hubbard, The Sobo of the Niger Delta, Zaria, 1948, pp. 82-84.

APPENDIX C

B. C. OBI'S CHRONOLOGY OF ABOH KINGS

B. C. Obi

Esumei	d. 1543
Ugbo	1543-1545
Ogwezi	1545-1580
Ojugbali I	1580-1616
Okeye	1616-1638
Opia	1638-1673
Ozegbe	1673-1691
Osumei	1691-1713
Enebeli	1713-1746
Imaga	1746-1791
Chiegwe	1791-1806
Ugboma	1806-1839
Ossai I	1839-1852
Olise	1852-1861
Ojugbali II	1861-1897
Imegwu	1897-1905
Ossai II	1910-1915
Oputa	1916- 1964

Source: B. C. Obi. History of Aboh (Unpublished MS. 1956).

APPENDIX C

Treaty between the Queen of Great Britain, and Obi Osai Chief of Aboh or (Eboe or Ibu.)

There shall be peace and friendship between the people of Great Britain and the people of Aboh, and the Slave-trade shall be put down for ever in the Aboh country, and the people of Great Britain and the people of Aboh shall trade together innocently, justly, kindly and usefully; and Captain Henry Dundas Trotter, Commander William Allen, Commander Bird Allen, and William Cook, Esq., Commissioners on the part of the Queen of Great Britain, and Obi Osai on his own part, and that of his people as Chief of the Aboh country, do make the following Agreement for these purposes.

1.--The Slave-trade shall be utterly abolished in the Aboh country, and from the signing of this Agreement, no person whatever shall be removed out of the country for the purpose of being treated or dealt with as slaves; nor shall any persons whatever be allowed to be brought through the country or any part thereof, for the purpose of being treated or dealt with as slaves by way of exportation or otherwise; nor shall any persons whatever be imported into the country for the purpose of being dealt

with as slaves, and no subject of the Aboh country shall be in any way concerned in the exporting or importing slaves, or carrying on the Slave-trade, either within or without the limits of the country. The Chief promises to inflict reasonable punishment on all his subjects who may break this law.

2.--The officers of the Queen of Great Britain may seize every vessel or boat of Aboh found anywhere carrying on the trade in slaves, and may also seize every vessel or boat of other nations with whom a similar agreement has been made, found carrying on the trade in slaves in the waters belonging to the Chief of Aboh: upon such seizure, and after regular condemnation, according to the provisions of this Agreement, the slaves shall be made free, and the vessels or boats shall be destroyed.

3.--That in all cases of the seizure of vessels and boats, with the slaves on board, under the provisions of this Agreement, the said Commissioners, or those of them who may be present, and in their absence the commissioned or commanding officer on board the British vessel making the seizure, or any agent authorized for that purpose, due examination and inquiry into the case, and shall condemn the said vessel or boat with the slaves on board, if satisfied that the provisions of this Agreement have been thus contravened; or otherwise acquit and restore the same.

4.--That from and after the signing of this Agreement, no person whatever coming into the country shall be reduced into slavery, or treated or used as slaves. All white persons whatever, and all British subjects, of whatever colour, at present detained in slavery, shall be immediately set free.

5.--British people may freely come into the Aboh country, and may stay in it, or pass through it; and they shall be treated as friends while in it, and they may leave the country with their property when they please.

6.--Christians, of whatever nation or country, peaceably conducting themselves in the dominions of the Chief of Aboh, shall be left in the free enjoyment and execise of the Christian religion, and shall not be hindered or molested in their endeavours to teach the same to all persons whatever willing and desirous to be taught; nor shall any subject of Aboh, who may embrace the Christian faith, be on that account, or on account of the teaching or exercise thereof, molested or troubled in any manner whatsoever.

7.--British people may always trade freely with the people of Aboh in every article which they may wish to sell, and neither the British people nor the people of Aboh shall ever be forced to buy or sell any article, nor shall they be prevented from buying or selling any article with whomsoever they please; and they shall not

be compelled to employ an agent, and the customs and dues taken by the Chief of Aboh on British goods sold in the Aboh country shall in no case be more altogether than one twentieth part of the goods so imported, or their ascertained value, and there shall be no duty, toll, or custom levied on goods exported.

8.--The paths shall be kept open through the Aboh country to other countries, so that British traders may carry goods of all kinds through the Aboh country to sell them elsewhere; and the traders of other countries may bring their goods through the Aboh country to trade with the British people.

9.--British people may buy and sell, or hire lands and houses in the Aboh country; and their houses shall not be entered without their consent, nor shall their goods be seized, nor their persons touched; and if British people are wronged or ill-treated by the people of Aboh, the Chief of Aboh shall punish those doing such wrong.

10.--But the British people must not break the laws of the Aboh country; and when they are accused of breaking the laws, the Chief may detain the person charged with committing any grievous crime in safe custody, taking care that he be treated with humanity; and shall send a true account of the matter to the nearest place where there is a British force; and the commander of such British force shall send for the British person, who shall be

tried according to British law, and shall be punished, if found guilty, and a report of such punishment shall be forwarded to the Chief for his satisfaction.

11.--If the Aboh people should take away the property of a British person, or should not pay their just debts to a British person, the Chief of Aboh shall do all he can to make the Aboh people restore the property and pay the debt; and if British persons should take away the property of the Aboh people, or shall not pay their just debts to the Aboh people, they shall be subject to the laws of the country for the recovery of the same; provided always that no injury be done to their persons. The Chief of Aboh shall make known the fact to the commander of the British force nearest to the Aboh country, or to the resident agent, if there is one; and the British commander or agent, whichever it may be, shall do all he can to make the British persons restore the property, and pay the debt.

12.--The Queen of Great Britain may appoint an agent to visit Aboh, or to reside there, in order to watch over the interests of the British people; and to see that this agreement is fulfilled; and such agent shall always receive honour and protection in the Aboh country; and the Aboh Chief shall pay attention to what the agent says, and the person and property of the agent shall be sacred.

13.--It is understood that all British vessels or boats are at liberty to navigate the river Niger, and its branches and tributaries, without the payment of any duties, tolls, or customs whatsoever. The Chief of Aboh promises to use his utmost endeavour to facilitate the conveyance of messengers and despatches to or from British people.

14.--The power of sanctioning or modifying this Treaty is expressly reserved to Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain.

15.--Any infringement of this Treaty will subject the Chief of Aboh to the severe displeasure of the Queen of Great Britain, and the loss of the duties herein stipulated for.

16. The Chief of Aboh shall within forty-eight hours of the date of this agreement, make a law for carrying the whole of it into effect, and shall proclaim that law; and the Chief of Aboh shall put that law in force from that time for ever.

17. The Queen of Great Britain, out of friendship for the Chief of Aboh, and because the Chief of Aboh has made this Agreement, gives him the following articles:

1 ornamented velvet cap.

1 double-barrelled gun, German silver mounted, flint lock.

1 pair of pistols, German silver mounted, flint lock.

1 Gilt mounted sabre.

6 yards of cotton velvet.

1 piece of Maddapolan.

2 pieces of printed Manchester goods.

½ piece of caricature handkerchiefs.

5 yards of superfine scarlet cloth.

5 yards of superfine blue cloth.

36 bead necklaces of sorts.

100 flints.

1 case, containing razors, knife, and scissors.

32 small looking-glasses.

1 large lustring umbrella.

1 telescope.

1 sergeant-major's dress complete.

4 red caps.

4 red jackets, baize.

4 shirts.

4 black jacks.

1½ piece of romal handkerchiefs.

1 pewter basin.

4 brass bracelets (bangles).

1 brass snuff-box.

2 dozen gilt buttons.

6 large pewter spoons.

6 small pewter spoons.

2 brass lamps.

1 padlock.

6 pocket knives.

1 saw.

2 pieces of Pondicherry.

1 piece of Naganapots.

2 pieces of brawls.

1 piece of Madras handkerchiefs.

1 piece of brown shirting.

2 pieces of Bejutepant.

1 piece of cotton Bandanas.

1 piece of Niccarree.

1 piece of Chillo.

6 tin horns.

1 Arabic Bible.

1 oil press.

And the Chief of Aboh hereby acknowledges he had received those articles.

And so we, Captain Henry Dundas Trotter, Commander William Allen, Commander Bird Allen, William Cook, Esq., and Obi Osai, Chief of Aboh, have made this Agreement, and have signed it on board Her Majesty's steam-vessel 'Albert,' off Aboh, this twenty-eighth day of August, one thousand eight hundred and forty-one; and this

Agreement shall stand for ever.

(Signed) H. D. TROTTER, Commissioner.
WILLIAM ALLEN, Commissioner.
BIRD ALLEN, Commissioner.
W. COOK, Commissioner.

his
OBI OSAI, + Chief of the Aboh Country.
mark,

Witnesses,
J. O. McWILLIAM, M.D., Surgeon,
JAMES FREDERICK SCHON, Missionary,
WILLIAM BOWDEN, Secretary.

Witnesses,

his
ARIBUNDA, +
mark
King Obi's Brothers,
his
AJEH, +
mark,
his
CHIKUMA, + King Obi's eldest Son.
mark,

ADDITIONAL ARTICLES.

The Chief of Aboh declares that no human beings are sacrificed on account of religious or other ceremonies or customs in the Aboh country, and hereby stipulates that he will prevent the introduction of such barbarous and inhuman customs and ceremonies into his country.

And so we, Captain Henry Dundas Trotter, Commander William Allen, Commander Bird Allen, William Cook, Esquire, and Obi Osai, Chief of Aboh, have made this Agreement, and have signed it on board Her Majesty's steam-vessel, 'Albert,' off Aboh, this twenty-eighth day of August, one thousand eight hundred and forty-one, and this Agreement shall stand for ever.

(Signed) H. D. TROTTER, Commissioner.
WILLIAM ALLEN, Commissioner.
BIRD ALLEN, Commissioner.
W. COOK, Commissioner.

his
OBI OSAI, + Chief of the Aboh Country
mark.

Witnesses,

J. O. McWILLIAM, M.D., Surgeon.

JAMES FREDERICK SCHON, Missionary.

WILLIAM BOWDEN, Secretary.

Witnesses,

his
ARIBUNDA, +
mark.

his
AJEH, +
mark.

King Obi's Brothers.

his
CHIKUMA +
mark.

King Obi's eldest Son.

APPENDIX D

From Eweka II, Oba of Benin to D.O. Benin Division
No 2A/30/1928, of 29th Feb. 1928.

(i) The Obi of Abo entered relationship with the Oba of Benin since long time ago; he was a son of Ozolua one of the Obas of Benin and was sent to Abo to be the paramount Ruler over all the Kwale-Ibo.

ii) The boundary between Obi and Oba is Eli and not Ethiope River.

iii) Before a man is nominated as the Obi of Abo, the consent and approval of the Oba of Benin is to be first obtained and a sword is to be sent to the Obi by the Oba to distinguish him from the other chiefs.

Eweka II

+

Oba of Benin

Sigd. D. O. Obaseki

Note: Elli is said to be a river next to Utagba town (Vide Tel. 16th March, 1928) from Executive Benin.

Source: Kwale Dist. 5. ANA 39.

APPENDIX E

Copy of Treaty, National African Company and Obi Imegwu dated Oct. 2, 1884

After the . . . years experience, we, the undersigned . . . fully recognize the benefit accorded to our country and people by our intercourse with the National African Company Limited , and, in recognition of this, we now cede the whole of our territory to the National African Company Limited and their administrators, for ever. In consideration of this, the National African Company Limited will not interfere with any of the native laws, and also not encroach on any private property unless the value is agreed upon by the owner and the said company.

The National African Company Limited will reserve to themselves the right of excluding foreign settlers.

Any palavar that may exist with any other tribe at any time, or in the event of any dispute arising between the . . . and territory, shall at once be referred to the National African Company Limited or then rep. at the time.

We, the . . . and district, do hereby agree to afford assistance at any time for the protection of the said company's property and people.

As per mutual consent of the . . . of the foregoing Agreement, the National African Company Limited agree to pay . . . .

Pro the National African Company Limited

David MacIntosh

In approval of the foregoing Agreement, we, the . . do herewith affix our names as under.

We the undersigned, are witnesses to the marks of the . . . and also vouch for their understanding what they have signed.

I do hereby declare that the foregoing agreement was duly and correctly explained to the above and fully understood it.

Declared before me at . . . this day of . . . 18 . . . .

EDWARD HYDE HEWETT

Her Britannic Majesty's Consul

(Consular stamp affixed here)

Source: Edward Herstlets, The Map of Africa by Treaty. London, 1890.

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